A guide for the new Muslim

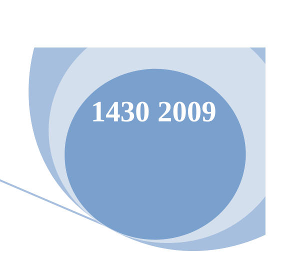
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{ English - إنجليزي }

Jammaal al-Din M. Zarabozo

2009-1430





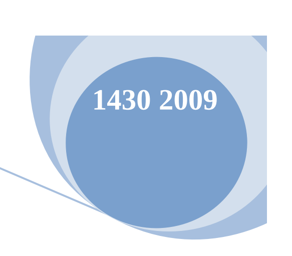
﴿دليل المسلم الجديد﴾

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جمال الدين زارابوزو

2009-1430

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Preface

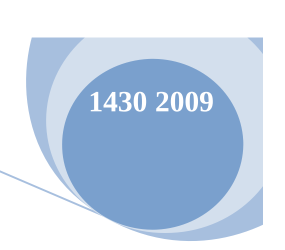
In the name of Allah, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. All praises are due to Allah; we praise Him; we seek His help; we seek His forgiveness; and we seek His guidance. We seek refuge in Allah from the evil in our souls and the badness of our deeds. For whomever Allah guides, there is none to lead him astray. And for whomever He allows to go astray, there is none to guide him. I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, for whom there is no partner. And I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.

I would like to take this opportunity to express praise and to thank Allah for giving me the opportunity to write an important work of this nature. May Allah forgive me for my shortcomings in presenting His religion.

As with *What is Islam*, this book's "sister," I must express my thanks to the noble Shaikh Muhammad al-Turki of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs, Endowments, Da'wah and Guidance for his support. I would also like to express my thanks to Ahmad Ba-Rasheed for his continual efforts as well. These two have been the driving force behind this project.

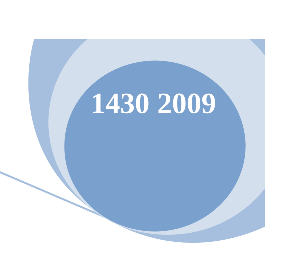
There are many people that I would like to thank for their help in this particular work. First, I must express my thanks to my beloved wife who is always a source of assistance and help. Special thanks must also go to Dr. Abdulkarim al-Saeed, Br. Nahar al-Rashid, Dr. Mohammad al-Osimi, Dr. Ahmad al-Teraiqi and Br. Jalaal Abdullah. I can only pray that Allah rewards them and blesses them in both this life and the Hereafter.

I must point out that I have previously written about many of the topics included in this work. I borrowed or adapted liberally from my earlier works *"He Came to Teach You Your Religion"* and *Purification of the Soul: Concept, Process and Means*. To a much lesser extent, I also adapted material from *What Is Islam* and *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi.*



I pray that Allah accepts this work from me as being solely for His sake. As with all such work, the responsibility for any mistakes lies with the author. I ask Allah to forgive me for my shortcomings and to guide me to the Straight Path.

Jamaal Zarabozo
Boulder, CO Jan. 17, 2007



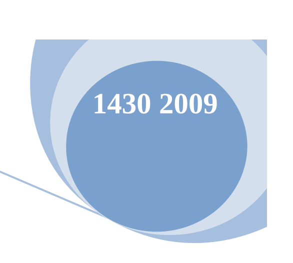
Congratulations to the New Muslim

Especially in these times with so many barriers placed in front of Islam and so many negative untruths spread about it, it is a great blessing from Allah that He gives specific individuals the ability to see the truth and light of Islam. A new Muslim—and, in fact, every Muslim—should always be thankful to Allah that Allah has blessed him with this ever-important knowledge and understanding of His religion.

By converting to Islam, the new Muslim has entered into a new realm that is most likely very different from his previous outlook on life. Perhaps most importantly though is that via Islam the individual has found the means by which the Lord will be pleased with him and he becomes pleased with his Lord.

As one grows more in Islam and as one's knowledge and faith increases, the individual is able to appreciate more and more of its beauty. In turn, one's love for Allah, Islam and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) shall continue to increase. The result is a spiritual life on a very special plane that only those who know this faith are able to experience and enjoy.

There is a lot to look forward to. The embracing of Islam is the significant first step and the rest, Allah willing, shall come by increasing one's knowledge, faith and attachment to Islam.



Introduction

The Goal and Motivation for Writing this Book

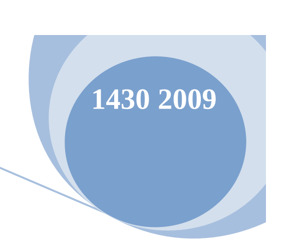
The goal of this work is to present the new Muslim with a basic guide that will help him understand and implement Islam. As already noted, the newly converted Muslim has set himself upon a new path that, most likely, is very different from the path that he was on before. The convert understands enough about Islam to recognize that it is the truth but he usually does not have enough detailed information about Allah's religion to guide him in his everyday affairs.

The author sincerely hopes that the individual will have the best experience in Islam by understanding it properly from the beginning and by applying it correctly in his life. Many are the converts to Islam who are bewildered and confused once they convert. Unfortunately, not every Muslim today is a good ambassador of Islam and not every Muslim today understands all of the basics of Islam. This can lead to a great deal of confusion, as some Muslim converts cannot even recognize the Islam that they see when compared to the Islam that they read about. This work is a modest attempt at assisting the new Muslim to set out along the correct path based on the Quran and Sunnah.

What Distinguishes This Work

Many introductory works on Islam are currently available. However, it is hoped that this work is distinct from the others due to a number of characteristics.

First, this is one of the few books currently available that specifically targets newly converted Muslims. In other words, it is directed toward those who have already been convinced of the truth of Islam and, hence, no arguments are presented herein to attempt to convince the reader of the truth of Islam. On the other hand, once a person embraces Islam there is still a wealth of information that the new convert needs. First, he needs to understand properly the foundations of his new faith. He also needs guidance concerning the most important practices of his new faith, including a good awareness of what deeds he must avoid as a Muslim.



Second, the writer himself is a convert to Islam. Thus, the author is able to draw upon his own experience as a convert and, by reflecting back upon that after so many years, can provide insight into what a convert needs to know and what are some of the pratfalls that he must avoid. This book can be looked upon as the book that the author wishes he had received when he first became Muslim. Furthermore, the author has dealt with many converts throughout the years and is aware of many of the conceptual and practical issues that other converts have had to deal with as well.

Third, the author has done his utmost to ensure that all of the information contained herein is verified and authentic. This is particularly true for any of the words attributed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Unfortunately, not everyone who writes about Islam gives this issue the attention it deserves, thereby including false information in their introductory works. In reality, one of the main reasons why this author embraced Islam is because its original teachings were kept pure: One can actually claim that the Quran is the word of God and the hadith are the words of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). This religion has come down to this generation in preserved form and it is a must that it not be distorted in any way. It is, therefore, incumbent upon those who write or speak about Islam to continue to make sure that what they are saying is the confirmed truth from Allah and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

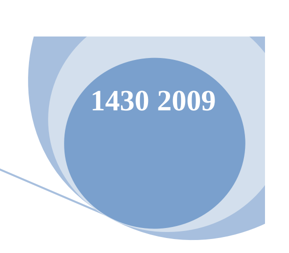
The Sources and Approach of This Book

The most important source for any work about Islam must be the Quran itself.[1] The Quran lays the foundation for the entirety of Islamic teachings.[2] Hence, due emphasis will be placed on Quranic evidence for the views expressed in this book.

However, the Quran was not simply revealed upon a mountainside for anyone to read and understand on his own. Allah chose to reveal the Quran to

[1] The reader should note how the verses of the Quran are referred to: *soorah* or "chapter" number followed by verse number, e.g., 2:16 would mean the sixteenth verse of the second chapter.

[2] If a book is supposed to be about Islam while it is void of Quranic verses and proofs for its view, the reader should be immediately and rightfully suspicious of such a book and the positions propagated in it.



the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and within the Quran itself ordered the Muslims to follow his example and to obey his commands.[3] His way of life is known as the Sunnah and has been captured in what is known as the hadith literature. Therefore, the guidance of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as contained in the authentic hadith[4] literature will also be heavily relied upon.

The Quran and Sunnah, therefore, form the ultimate sources of one's understanding of Islam. Any other source must be secondary to these sources and subject to their overall approval. In other words, if something is contrary to the Quran and Sunnah, it cannot justifiably be considered part of Islam.

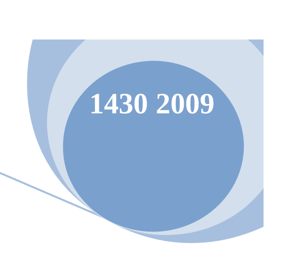
Furthermore, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) raised up a generation under this guidance and direction. Although his Companions were simply humans—and as such had, to some extent, human faults—their overall understanding and application of Islam was approved by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself. Thus, their overall way will be treated here as the proper and correct way of understanding Islam.

Finally, the author has benefited from the works of many who have written about Islam, including the leading scholars throughout the history of Islam as well as many others who have also written introductory works. Reference to such authors or works will be made throughout this book.

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[3] The authority and status of the Sunnah—the example and teachings of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)—has been affirmed in more than forty places in the Quran. For more on this point, see this author's *The Authority and Importance of the Sunnah* (Denver, CO: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2000)

[4] The hadith are the reports of the Prophet's actions and statements. The evaluation of hadith is very precise and scientific, allowing the scholars throughout the ages to sift the authentic reports from the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) from the inauthentic reports.



The Religion of Islam

The Meaning of the Word “Islam”

The word “Islam” is the verbal noun of the verb *aslama*. This verb is defined as, “He resigned or submitted himself.” When used with respect to God, it means, “He became submissive to God.”[5] Thus, Islam is about an individual recognizing who his Lord is and recognizing that his attitude toward his Lord and Creator should be one of submission and worship. In other words, Islam is not simply about the recognition of the Oneness of God or the fact that the Creator exists, for example. Islam is about something much greater than that. It is about the conscious decision made by the individual to worship and submit to the one and only God.

Thus, as Nomani wrote,

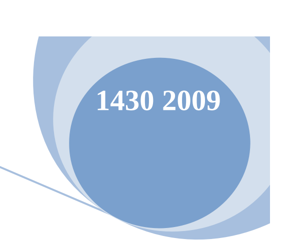
Literally, Islam denotes self-surrender or to give oneself up to someone and accept his overlordship in the fullest sense of the term. The religion sent down by God and brought into the world by His Apostles has been called Islam for the simple reason that, in it, the bondsman yields completely to the power and control of the Lord and makes the rendering of whole-hearted obedience to Him the cardinal principle of his life. This is the sum and substance of the Islamic creed.[6]

Perhaps it should be noted that the word “Islam” does not mean “peace.” It is true that the Arabic word for “peace” (*salaam*) comes from the same root as the word Islam. It is also very true that true peace—both internally and externally—can only be the result of the correct implementation of Islam. At the same time, though, it should be very clear in the minds of every Muslim that his religion being Islam represents his commitment and devotion to worshipping and submitting to Allah alone. This should become the essence of what the individual Muslim is all about.

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[5] E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, England: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), vol.1, p. 1413.

[6] Mohammad Manzoor Nomani, *Meaning and Message of the Traditions* (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1975), vol. 1, p. 54.



Before discussing the relationship between Islam and the other religions, it is important to recognize a more specific usage for the word "Islam" as a religion. Islam, as stated above, implies the complete submission to the one and only true God. Thus, anyone who is truly submitting himself to God—according to what has been revealed from God and not simply according to his own whims or imagination—is a Muslim.

In this sense, the religion of all of the prophets of God was Islam and they were all Muslims. Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, for example, were all Muslims and their religion was Islam, the true and sincere submission to God. Thus, Allah says in the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), "The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah - that which We have sent by inspiration to you - and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus" (42:13).

The following important passage from the Quran highlights the fact that Abraham, for example, was a true servant and worshipper of Allah alone. In other words, he was a Muslim. He was not a Jew or a Christian. His true followers were Muslims. The true followers of Moses and Jesus were also Muslims. Allah says,

And (remember) when Abraham and (his son) Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House [in Makkah], (saying), "Our Lord! Accept (this service) from us. Verily! You are the All-Hearer, the All-Knower. Our Lord! And make us submissive [Muslims] unto You and of our offspring a nation submissive [Muslims] unto You, and show us our ceremonies of pilgrimage, and accept our repentance. Truly, You are the One Who accepts repentance, the Most Merciful. Our Lord! Send amongst them[7] a Messenger of their own, who shall recite unto them Your Verses and instruct them in the Book and Wisdom, and purify them. Verily! You are the All-Mighty, the All-Wise.

And who turns away from the religion of Abraham except him who befools himself? Truly, We chose him in this world and verily, in the Hereafter he will be among the righteous. When his Lord said to him, "Submit (i.e. be a Muslim)!" He said, "I have submitted myself (as a Muslim) to the Lord of the

[7] The descendants of Ishmael. Ishmael was the son of Abraham and Muhammad was a descendant of Ishmael.

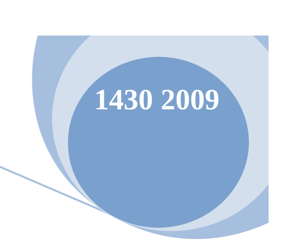


worlds." And this (submission to Allah, Islam) was enjoined by Abraham upon his sons and by Jacob, (saying), "O my sons! Allah has chosen for you the (true) religion, then die not except as Muslims." Or were you witnesses when death approached Jacob? When he said unto his sons, "What will you worship after me?" They said, "We shall worship your God, the God of your fathers, Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, One God, and to Him we submit (in Islam).

That was a nation who has passed away. They shall receive the reward of what they earned and you of what you earn. And you will not be asked of what they used to do. And they say, "Be Jews or Christians, then you will be guided." Say (to them, O Muhammad), "Nay, (we follow) only the religion of Abraham, of pure monotheism, and he was not of those who worshipped others along with Allah." Proclaim (O Muslims), "We believe in Allah and that which has been sent down to us and that which has been sent down to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and to the twelve sons of Jacob, and that which has been given to Moses and Jesus, and that which has been given to the Prophets from their Lord. We make no distinction between any of them, and to Him we have submitted (in Islam)." So if they believe in the like of that which you believe, then they are rightly guided, but if they turn away, then they are only in opposition. So Allah will suffice you against them. And He is the All- Hearer, the All-Knower. [Our religion is] the Religion of Allah and which religion can be better than Allah's? And we are His worshippers.

Say [O Muhammad to the Jews and Christians], "Dispute you with us about Allah while He is our Lord and your Lord? And we are to be rewarded for our deeds and you for your deeds. And we are sincere to Him in worship and obedience.

Or do you say that Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob and the twelve sons of Jacob were Jews or Christians? Say, "Do you know better or does Allah [know better that they all were Muslims]? And who is more unjust than he who conceals the testimony he has from Allah? And Allah is not unaware of what you do." That was a nation who has passed away. They shall receive the reward of what they earned, and you of what you earn. And you will not be asked of what they used to do. (2:127-141).



In fact, as this passage demonstrates, Islam was the religion of all of their followers as well. In other words, every true believer from the time of Adam to the last believer on earth practices Islam and is a Muslim. Furthermore, it is the only religion that Allah ever commanded humankind to follow. Islam, therefore, is the only religion that has ever been acceptable to Allah. Allah says, "Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam (submission to Him)" (3:19). Allah also says, "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers" (3:85).

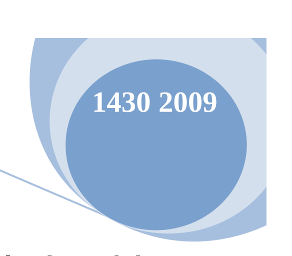
Thus, the brotherhood of Islam and the bond of true faith stretches all the way from Adam until the end of time, spanning all localities and peoples. The true believers love one another and support one another. It is truly a blessed and unique brotherhood.

In particular, the true Muslims throughout all the ages believe in all of the prophets. They support all of them and defend their honor as well. One would never hear a pious Muslim ever speak badly about Abraham, Isaac, Moses, Jesus or any of the prophets. Instead, the Muslim respects, honors and loves them *all* in the manner they deserve.

Islam: The Religion of the Prophet Muhammad

After the coming of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), there is a further distinction that needs to be made concerning the religion of "Islam."

Before the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), one could say that there were many "Islams." That is, each people had their prophets, followed their teachings and were on the path of Islam. At the same time, if a new prophet in the same line of prophets came to them, they had no choice but to follow that new prophet. The one who would refuse to accept Allah's later prophet is not truly submitting to Allah. If he is not truly submitting to Allah, then he is not a "Muslim."



There are two very important points that demonstrate the relationship between the way of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the way of the true prophets before him.

First, the way of the Prophet Muhammad abrogates the previous laws.

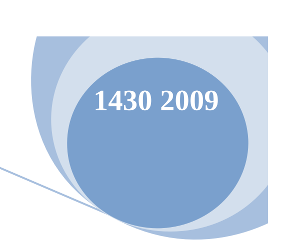
Second, by the wisdom of Allah, Allah did not allow the teachings of the previous prophets to remain preserved in a completely undistorted manner.

Allah says, "And We have sent down to you (O Muhammad) the Book in truth, confirming the Scripture that came before it and a witness over it (old Scriptures). So judge between them by what Allah has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging away from the truth that has come to you" (5:48). This verse demonstrates that the Quran has been revealed in truth and confirms what has been revealed beforehand of the revelations and it is a judge and witness over the previous books. In other words, it preserves, protects and witnesses to the truth found in the earlier revelations.

At the same time, though, it shows the falseness of the distortions that have been done to the previous revelations. Anything that is in conformity with the Quran is true and anything that contradicts the Quran must be false. Thus, the Quran has been revealed to affirm what has been preserved of the earlier revelations while correcting any distortions.

A clear example of this nature has to do with the supposed crucifixion of Jesus Christ. This supposed act is the entire basis for raising the Prophet Jesus (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) to the level of God. The Quran's view on this issue however is very clear: "And because of their saying (in boast), 'We killed Messiah Jesus, son of Maryam (Mary), the Messenger of Allah,' - but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but the resemblance of Jesus was put over another man (and they killed that man), and those who differ therein are full of doubts. The have no (certain) knowledge, they follow nothing but conjecture. For surely; they killed him not" (4:157).[8]

[8] This author is an ex-Christian and he has noted on many occasions that a proper understanding of passages of the Bible can be found via the preserved Quran and Arabic language, which is related to the Semitic language Hebrew. For example, one passage of the Bible that is critiqued often is Genesis 2:2-3. The King James Version (with the New King James Version being essentially



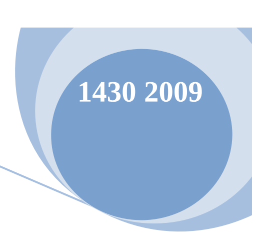
Distortion of the earlier books has been alluded to in numerous places in the Quran. For example, Allah says in reference to the People of the Book, "Then woe to those who write the Book with their own hands and then say, 'This is from Allah,' to purchase with it a little price! Woe to them for what their hands have written and woe to them for that they earn thereby" (2:79) and "And verily, among them is a party who distort the Book with their tongues, so that you may think it is from the Book, but it is not from the Book, and they say: 'This is from Allah,' but it is not from Allah; and they speak a lie against Allah while they know it" (3:78). Therefore, the Prophet said, "Do not affirm what the People of the Book say nor deny them. Instead, say, 'We believe in what has been revealed to us what has been revealed to you. Our God and your God is one and we submit to Him as Muslims.'"[9]

It is interesting to note that the only religion that has kept the name "submission to Allah" or Islam is that of the final Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The other well-known religions are all named after individuals, peoples or places. According to *Microsoft Encarta*, the term Judaism did not even exist in pre-modern Hebrew. It is in reference to Judah. Christianity is, of course, named after Christ as Buddhism is named after Buddha. Hinduism has to do with the place, Hindustan. But, by Allah's wisdom and mercy, the name of the only true religion of submission to Allah—the reli-

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the same) of this verse reads, "And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made." The critique of this verse is that obviously God is not in need of resting. However, the Hebrew of the relevant portion of that verse is transliterated as, *bowshaabat*. The Arabic word for the day of the Sabbath is *al-sabt*, which comes from the root *sabata*, which means a cessation of activities. Hence, the Biblical passage properly understood probably means that God ceased the activity of creation in the manner that He was doing it on the previous "days." In fact—and this author does not know if the translator was helped by a knowledge of Arabic—*Young's Literal Translation* of 1898 translates these same verses of Genesis as, "And God completeth by the seventh day His work which He hath made, and *ceaseth* by the seventh day from all His work which He hath made. And God blesseth the seventh day, and sanctifieth it, for in it He hath *ceased* from all His work which God had prepared for making" (emphasis added). For the meaning of *sabata*, see Abu Abdullah Muhammad al-Qurtubi, *Tafseer al-Qurtubi* (Beirut: Daar Ihyaa al-Turaath al-Arabi, n.d.), vol. 19, pp. 171-172. The different translations and transliteration of the Bible were taken from *The Bible Library* [Software] (Oklahoma City, OK: Ellis Enterprises, 2001).

[9] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



gion of all the prophets—has been preserved and kept only in reference to the mission of the final prophet who was sent for all of humanity.[10]

As a final note, although the message of the Prophet Muhammad is nothing but a continuation of the message of the earlier prophets, Christians and Jews are in no way to be coerced to embrace Islam or to follow its teachings. Allah says, "There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the Right Path has become distinct from the wrong path. Whoever disbelieves in false gods and believes in Allah, then he has grasped the most trustworthy handhold that will never break. And Allah is All-Hearer, All-Knower" (2:256). They should, though, be called to the truth of Islam and invited to follow the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

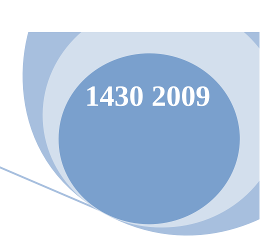
The Final Message

Allah had sent numerous prophets throughout the centuries. However, He had determined that He should send a final messenger with a final message. This final messenger would be the messenger for all of humankind from his time until the Day of Reckoning. There was to be no later revelation and no later prophet to bring any changes to this revelation. Hence, this one had to differ from the previous in some ways.

First, since no one could come later to correct any mistakes or distortions, the revelation received by the last prophet had to be preserved in its pristine purity.

Second, the nature of the "sign" of the last prophet would have to be different as well. This is because this sign would have to affect not only the people who were alive during the time of the prophet but also all those who would come later.

[10] In the 1800s and early 1900s, it was common for missionaries and Orientalists to refer to Islam as Mohamedanism and to Muslims as Mohamedans. They were giving this religion a name in the same way that they had names for their own religions. But such is not acceptable for Islam and the use of these terms has, for the most part, been successfully squashed. In reality, such terms are actually an affront to the religion as Muslims do not worship Muhammad in any way.



Third, this final prophet could not simply be sent for one community among humankind—each then having their own final prophet and then differing with one another. This final prophet had to be sent for all of humankind, putting an end to the succession of prophets and being suitable for the world as a whole.

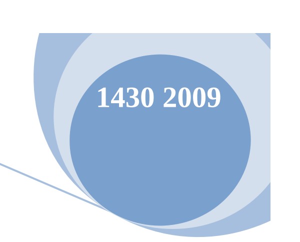
Fourth, the laws and teachings of this message had to be fixed in matters that need to be fixed for all of humankind until the Day of Judgment and guiding yet flexible or accommodating in those matters that need to be open to change due to the changing circumstances of humankind.

On all of these points, one sees that it is the message of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that fits all of these criteria. The Quran and the Sunnah were preserved in great detail. Similarly, the nature of his "sign," the Quran, the ultimate miracle, can still be experienced today.[11]

As for the third issue, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was the only prophet to make it known that he was not sent only for a certain people but he was sent for all the various peoples of the world. The Jews, for example, consider themselves to be a chosen race and that their message is meant exclusively for themselves. Thus, many orthodox Jews do not believe in proselytizing their faith. The New Testament also makes it clear that Jesus' mission was to the Tribes of Israel. Matthew 10: 5-6 read: "These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." Jesus is reported to have said when the Canaanite woman came to him for help, "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matthew 15:24).[12] This limited mission of Jesus' is also affirmed in the Quran (61:6).

[11] A discussion of these points is beyond the scope of this work. The author has dealt with them in *What is Islam* (Riyadh: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2006).

[12] In the same context, Jesus in quoted in Matthew 15:26 as saying about helping the Canaanite woman, "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and cast it to dogs." Again, God alone knows what parts of the Gospels attributed to Jesus were actually said by him.



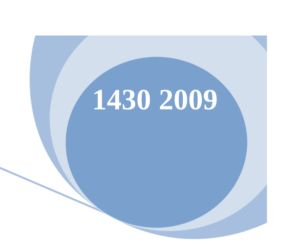
In the case of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), however, Allah says, "Say (O Muhammad to the people), 'O mankind! Verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah' (7:158). Another verse reads, "And We have not sent you (O Muhammad) except as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind" (34:28). There are yet other verses giving the same purport. The Prophet Muhammad also stated that he was distinguished from the earlier prophets by five matters. The last he mentioned was, "The prophet would be sent to his people only while I have been sent to all of mankind."[13]

Allah decreed that this Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) should be His final messenger. Allah says, "Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the seal of the Prophets. And Allah is Ever All-Aware of everything" (33:40). The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself said, "I have been sent to all of the creation and the prophets have been sealed by me."[14] Again, he said, "The Children of Israel were led by the prophets; whenever a prophet died, a prophet succeeded (him). Lo! There will be no prophet after me"[15]

Hence, no one has the right to accept the other prophets while rejecting the Prophet Muhammad. No one has the right to say that Muhammad was truthful but, "I chose to still follow Jesus or Moses instead." Logically speaking, one should not expect this to be acceptable to Allah. Allah has sent His final messenger to be believed in and followed, superseding and canceling what is left of the teachings of earlier prophets. In the Quran, Allah describes such an attitude: "And when it is said to them, 'Believe in what Allah has sent down,' they say, 'We believe in what was sent down to us.' And they disbelieve in that which came after it, while it is the truth confirming what is with them" (2:91).

Allah has further declared people of this nature to be disbelievers. He has said, "Verily, those who disbelieve in Allah and His Messengers and wish to make distinction between Allah and His Messengers (by believing in Allah and disbelieving in His Messengers) saying, 'We believe in some but reject others,'

[13] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[14] Recorded by Muslim.
[15] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.



and wish to adopt a way in between. They are in truth disbelievers. And We have prepared for the disbelievers a humiliating torment. And those who believe in Allah and His Messengers and make no distinction between any of them, We shall give them their rewards, and Allah is Ever Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (4:150-152).

The Prophet said, "[I swear] by [God], the One in whose hand is my soul, there will be none of my addressed people, be he Jew or Christian, who hears of me and dies without believing in that with which I was sent except that he will be from the inhabitants of the Hell-fire."[16] The Prophet even told one of his companions, "If my brother Moses were alive today, he would have no option but to follow me."[17]

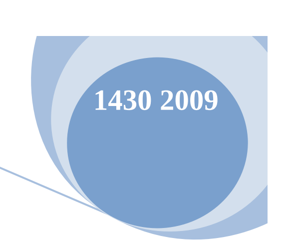
The Universality of Islam and Its Timelessness

The Prophet Muhammad is the final messenger and it is inconceivable knowing the mercy of the merciful that He would leave humans without any form of clear guidance. In other words, what He gave this final message must be suitable to guide mankind after him. In fact, the Prophet himself made this very same point in essence when he said, "I have left with you two things that if you cling to them you will never be misguided after me: The Book of Allah and the Sunnah of His Messenger."[18]

In addition to the fact that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the final prophet, Allah has also said, "This day, I have perfected your religion for you, completed My Favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion" (5:3). Allah has also declared that the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is the prophet for all of mankind: "Say [O Muhammad], 'O Mankind, indeed I am the Messenger of Allah to you all" (7:158).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, "I have been given five aspects that were not given to any prophet before me... [One

[16] Recorded by Muslim.
[17] Recorded by Ahmad and al-Daarimi. According to al-Albaani, this is a good hadith. al-Albaani, *Irwa*, vol. 6, p. 34.
[18] Recorded by Muslim.



of which is] every prophet was sent only to his people while I have been sent to all of mankind."[19] Thus, the religion is completed and perfected and there is no need for any alteration or change. The message has come and shall suffice until the Day of Judgment. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) sent for all peoples has already come.

This implies that the Prophet's teaching and his Sunnah are valid and obligatory upon all of mankind. That is, his example and teaching was not simply for the people of Arabia at his time. Instead, it is just as valid and just as important for each and every Muslim today, whether he be in New York or Malaysia.

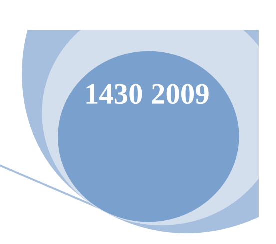
Someone may logically ask: How is it that this Law is able to fulfill the needs for all of humankind until the Day of Judgment? The answer has to do with the beauty of the Law. When one studies the law promulgated by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) one finds that it has the needed elements of flexibility that allow it to be just as practicable today as it was during the time of the Prophet.

First, in reality, the nature of humans actually do not change over time. Therefore, worship, which is the foundation of a human's character, does not need to change. These laws are fixed until the Day of Judgment.

Secondly, there are some harmful matters that humans must avoid. These have also been explicitly and permanently forbidden. Beyond that, humans need only some detailed laws and many general principles that allow them to guide their lives in all times and places. This is exactly what Islamic Law provides for them.

In essence, those issues that need be fixed and permanent are made such by the Islamic Law. Those that need to be flexible so that different peoples at different times may apply them differently are left flexible in the Islamic Law. Hence, it is a Divinely guided way of life that is suitable and practical for all humans until the Day of Judgment. For example, in business dealings, interest is prohibited forever.

[19] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.



In addition to that, general guidelines are given. However, the guidance is such that when new forms of business dealings are developed, as in modern times, one can determine which are acceptable according to Islamic guidelines and which are not. Thus, Islamic Law has been proven to be feasible for over 1400 years and, according to Islamic beliefs, will continue to be feasible until the Day of Judgment.

This means that the guidance is complete. It is all that the Muslims need for happiness in this world and in the Hereafter. It cannot be improved upon. It is, therefore, in no need of additions, alterations or deletions. For this obvious reason, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) gave very strong warnings about innovations and heresies. Such things are not needed at all and they will simply take away from the beauty and perfection of Islam.

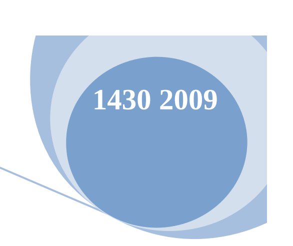
Thus, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "The worst actions are the invented ones. And every innovation is a going astray."[20] He also said, "And every going astray is in the hell fire."[21] The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, "Whoever introduces anything into this affair of ours that does not belong to it will have it rejected."[22]

The Sources of Islamic Law and Guidance

The goal of Islam is for the human to become a true servant of Allah. Therefore, his source of guidance and the foundations for his actions must be rooted in the revelation from God. It is from this vantage point that the scholars speak about the sources of law in Islam. The two ultimate authorities in Islamic Law are the Quran and the Sunnah of the Prophet.

The Quran is the speech of Allah and a revelation that came directly to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) from Allah via the angel Gabriel.[23] The Quran was revealed piece by piece over a period of twenty-

[20] Recorded by Muslim.
[21] Recorded by al-Nasaa'i.
[22] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[23] A recommended work dispelling the claims that the Quran is not a revelation from God is: Hamza Mustafa Njozi, *The Sources of the Quran: A Critical Review of the Authorship Theories* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: World Assembly of Muslim Youth, 1991).



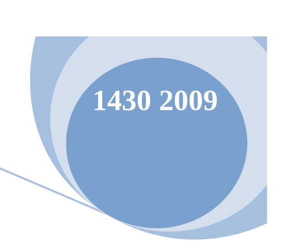
three years. It guided the early Muslim community along every step it took. It thus completely transformed that community into a pious generation. In the meantime, it set examples for all later Muslim communities who will face some of the same circumstances they faced. It transformed an Arab people who were on the margins of the civilized world at that time into the leaders of a great civilization, whose influence still continues today. When read, understood and applied properly today, it will also transform individuals or society and exalt them to new heights of piety and closeness to God.

Upon receiving the words of the Quran, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would pass those words onto his followers. In addition, he would have his scribes record the newly revealed verses. The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said about the Quran, "There was no Prophet among the Prophets but was given miracles because of which people had had belief, but what I have been given is the Divine Revelation which Allah has revealed to me. So I hope that my followers will be more than those of any other Prophet on the Day of Resurrection."[24] In other words, the Prophet Muhammad's great sign and miracle was the Quran.

Indeed, the Quran is miraculous in many ways. For example, the Arabs at the time of the Prophet excelled in language. However, even though they greatly opposed the Prophet for many years, they realized that they could not meet the literary eloquence of the Quran.[25] But the Quran is much more than simply a "literary miracle." It is miraculous as well with respect to its fulfilled prophecies of future events, its internal consistency (although revealed over a period of twenty-three years), its scientific accuracy, its historical accuracy, its precise preservation, its magnanimous and wise laws, its affect that it had and still has in reforming and changing humans and so forth.

[24] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim. The Quran has also put out a challenge for anyone to produce anything similar to the Quran. For example, Allah says, "And if you are in doubt concerning that which We have sent down [i.e., the Quran] to Our servant [Muhammad], then produce a chapter of the like thereof and call your supporters and helpers besides Allah, if you are truthful" (2:23). To this day, this challenge has not been successfully met.

[25] The best discussion in English of this aspect of the miraculous nature of the Quran is Muhammad Abdullah Draz, *The Quran: An Eternal Challenge* (Leicester, United Kingdom: The Islamic Foundation, 2001), pp. 65-179.



In addition to the Quran, there are the sayings and example of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), known as the Sunnah. It is also a form of inspiration that was given by Allah to the Prophet. The Prophet said, "I have been given the Quran and something similar to it with it."[26]

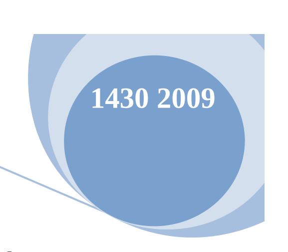
The authority of the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah is not because he is some kind of demigod. He was definitely only a human being, just like all of the other prophets. The prophet's authority is related to the issue of submission to Allah: It is Allah in the Quran who establishes the authority of the Prophet. Hence, following the way of the Prophet is nothing but acting in obedience and submission to Allah. Allah has virtually said such when He said, "He who obeys the Messenger has indeed obeyed Allah, but he who turns away, then we have not sent you (O Muhammad) as a watcher over them" (4:80).

In the Quran, Allah makes it clear that if someone loves Allah and wishes that Allah should love him in return, the key is to follow the way of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Allah says, "Say (O Muhammad to humankind), 'If you (truly) love Allah then follow me, Allah will love you and forgive you of your sins. And Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful'" (3:31).

The Quran says about the Prophet, "Indeed in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example to follow for him who hopes in (the Meeting with) Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much" (33:21). The Prophet was, in a way, a "living Quran." When the Prophet's wife Aishah was asked about his character and behavior, she replied, "His character was the Quran."[27]

There is a very important relationship between the Quran and the Sunnah. The Sunnah demonstrates how the Quran is to be implemented. It is a practical explanation of what the Quran is teaching. It defines the morals, behaviors and laws of the Quran in such a way that its meaning becomes clear.

[26] Recorded by Abu Dawood. According to al-Albaani, it is authentic. See Muhammad Naasir al-Din al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islaami, 1986), #2643.
[27] Recorded by Muslim.



This complete, human embodiment of the teachings of the Quran is a great blessing and mercy for Muslims. It makes the guidance from God more complete and accessible to all.

Thus, the Quran and the Sunnah form one united unit that offers all the principles of guidance that humankind will need until the Day of Judgment.

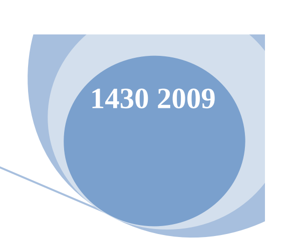
The Quran, of course, comprises one book that can be captured in some two hundred pages or so. The Sunnah, on the other hand, is quite different, covering all of the statements and actions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). The Sunnah is captured in what is known as the hadith literature. A hadith is a report about what the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said or did.[28]

Muslim scholars recognized that the religion of Allah must be preserved properly. They also recognized that not everything attributed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) may be correct as even honest people can make mistakes. Hence, they meticulously and methodically studied the various hadith and statements ascribed to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), sifting those that can be authenticated from those that cannot be authenticated. Thus, in Islamic law, not every hadith is considered an authority. Only those that can meet rigid standards of authenticity are considered authoritative. The scholars call these types of hadith *sahih* (authentic) or *hasan* (good). Unacceptable hadith are classified as *daeef* (weak), very weak or fabricated.

Although the original Arabic texts of both the Quran and the Prophet's sayings are available, one has to resort to modest translations to convey their meanings to non-Arabic speakers. With respect to the Quran, two translations in particular can be recommended. They are *The Noble Quran: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary*, translated by al-Hilali and Khan[29], and *The Quran: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meaning*, translated by

[28] Actually, hadith may also describe the physical characteristics of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and other details of his life.

[29] Muhammad al-Hilali and Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans., *The Noble Quran: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (Madinah, Saudi Arabia: King Fahd Complex for the Printing of the Holy Quran, n.d.). This translation has also been published by others and is easily available over the internet.



"Saheeh International."[30] These two are recommended due to their translations being based upon the understanding of the Quran as can be traced back to the Prophet himself and his closest Companions.

To truly appreciate the depths of the Quran, one should also read a commentary of the Quran. Unfortunately, there are not a large number of excellent commentaries available in English—although there is a plethora of them in many other languages.

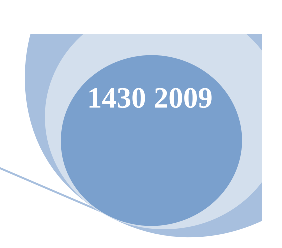
One very important work available in English is the ten-volume *Tafsir ibn Kathir (Abridged).*[31] This is the translation of an abridgment of a classical work of Quranic commentary by ibn Kathir (1301-1372 C.E.) In his study of Quranic commentaries, Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabi calls this commentary one of the best of its kind.[32] In this work, ibn Kathir follows the principles of Quranic commentary as elucidated by his teacher, the well-known ibn Taimiyyah.[33] Perhaps the only drawback of this work is that it is a translation of a classic work and therefore was not written in a style that many today are most comfortable with.

Towards Understanding the Quran: English Version of Tafhim al-Quran[34] by Abul Ala Maudoodi is also one of the most complete and extensive works of Quranic commentary available in English. It was written by Abul Ala Maudoodi, who died in 1979. Maudoodi wrote numerous books and a large number of them have been translated into English.

The goal of the *Tafhim al-Quran* was to present the meaning of the Quran to the Urdu speaking populous of Pakistan/India in such a way that its meaning would be very clear to the masses. Although this work has been the

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[30] Saheeh International, *The Quran: Arabic Text with Corresponding English Meaning* (London: AbulQasim Publishing House, 1997).
[31] *Tafsir ibn Kathir (Abridged)* (Riyadh: Darussalam, 2000).
[32] Muhammad Hussein al-Dhahabi, *al-Tafseer wa al-Mufasirun* (Dar al-Kutub al-Haditha, 1976), vol. 1, p. 247.
[33] For more details on his principles of Quranic exegesis, see Roy Young Muhammad Curtis, "Authentic Interpretation of Classical Islamic Texts: An Analysis of the Introduction of Ibn Kathir's '*Tafseer* al-Quran al-Azim,'" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1989), passim.
[34] Abul Ala Maudoodi, *The Meaning of the Quran* (Lahore, Pakistan: Islamic Publications, 1982).



target of various criticisms, some warranted[35] and some not so warranted, it remains as the most comprehensive and informative works on the entire Quran available in English.

Another work that the serious student should take note of is *Tafsir Ishraq al-Ma'ani: Being a Quintessence of Quranic Commentaries* by Syed Iqbal Zaheer. This work is written by a contemporary author and is quite comprehensive.

As for collections of hadith or the statements and actions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), two important collections are available in complete form in English. They are known as *Sahih al-Bukhari*[36] and *Sahih Muslim*.[37]

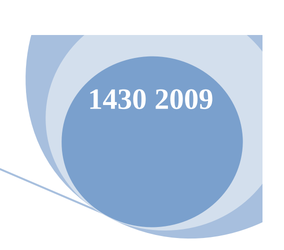
As stated earlier, Islamic Law has to be flexible enough to meet the needs of all peoples until the Day of Judgment. Hence, not every detail of the law has been spelled out in the Quran and Sunnah. Allah has left some issues for the Muslims to discover on their own, thus forcing them to learn and study the Quran and Sunnah in great detail. The conclusions that are derived from the Quran and Sunnah, and not explicitly stated in the Quran or Sunnah, are known as "personal reasoning" or *ijtihaad* (which implies utmost striving to derive a conclusion).

This source of jurisprudence is obviously not infallible. In fact, it is possible for scholars to come to differing conclusions—although the truth with Allah will always be only one. Each scholar's efforts, if they are sincere, will be appreciated by Allah, as the hadith states, "If a judge exerts himself and comes

[35] For example, Maududi stresses the importance of the Prophet (peace be upon him) in understanding the Quran, however, his commentary itself does not have a great reliance on hadith. The most common usage of hadith is when he discusses some of the fiqh rulings. Furthermore, sometimes the hadith he uses are not of acceptable quality. In addition, he also only occasionally quotes the explanations of the verses as given by the Companions of the Prophet (peace be upon him). Finally, he does have a tendency to reinterpret some of the attributes of Allah in ways that are not consistent, for example, with the understanding of the Companions and their followers.

[36] Muhammad Muhsin Khan, trans., *Sahih al-Bukhari* (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 1997). Available via many sources on the Internet.

[37] Abdul Hamid Siddiqi, trans., *Sahih Muslim* (Lahore, Pakistan: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf Publishers & Booksellers, n.d.). Also widely available.



to a correct conclusion, he shall receive two rewards. If he exerts himself and comes to an errant conclusion, he shall receive one reward."[38]

However, this does not mean that their conclusions become an ultimate authority. Personal judgments must be evaluated in the light of the Quran and Sunnah and whatever seems to be most proper according to the Quran and Sunnah should be adhered to. It is important for the Muslim to always remember that his ultimate goal is to follow the truth, which means that which is consistent with the Quran or Sunnah.[39]

A historical development occurred in which specific scholars worked diligently to codify the laws of the Quran and Sunnah as well as extend those laws through personal reasoning to situations not explicitly covered in those texts. The work of these scholars continued until "schools of law" developed based on their teachings. Although these different schools of law are definitely not sources of Islamic law nor are they considered infallible in any way, it is important that the new Muslim become familiar with them because he will most likely here reference often to them.

The most dominant of these schools of law are four, named after their founders as follows:

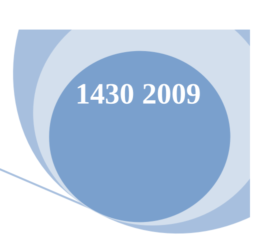
(1) Abu Haneefah (80-150 A.H.[40]) and the Hanafi School: Abu Haneefah was an early scholar who lived in Iraq. Today, his school is the most predominant in Turkey, Pakistan, India, Afghanistan, the ex-Soviet Muslim states and parts of the Middle East.

(2) Maalik ibn Anas (95-179 A.H.) and the Maliki School: Maalik ibn Anas lived in Madinah, the city of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), throughout his life. Today, his school is the most popular in North Africa and

[38] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[39] Another important concept is that of *ijmaa* or consensus. The Prophet said, "Allah will not bring together My Nation upon an error." (Recorded by al-Tirmidhi and considered authentic by al-Albaani.) Thus, if all the Muslim scholars should agree on an issue, the agreed upon point also becomes authoritative.

[40] "A.H." stands for after the *Hijrah* or migration of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) from Makkah to Madinah. This event marks the beginning of the Islamic calendar.



sub-Saharan Africa. For centuries it was the predominant school of Andalusia or Muslim Spain.

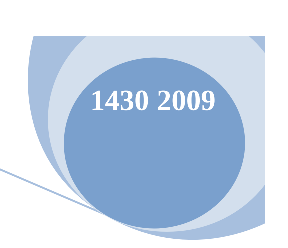
(3) Muhammad ibn Idrees al-Shafi'ee (150-204 A.H.) and the Shafi'ee School: Al-Shafi'ee was from the Qurashi tribe, the same tribe as the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He studied and lived in numerous places, finally settling in Egypt. Today, his school is most influential in Malaysia, Indonesia and some parts of the Middle East.

(4) Ahmad ibn Hanbal (164-241 A.H.) and the Hanbali School: Ahmad ibn Hanbal lived in Baghdad and was known to be a great scholar of hadith. Today, his school is the predominant school in Saudi Arabia and other parts of the Arabian Peninsula.

These great scholars and others sometimes came to differing conclusions. It is important to understand that there are many causes for differences of opinion among the jurists. There are also some important points to be kept in mind with respect to such differences of opinion among the scholars that one is bound to run into in Islam.

First, as stated earlier, the ultimate goal of the Muslim is "the truth." Hence, he should exert himself to discover the truth and follow it in every circumstance. The manner in which the revelation has come offers the individual the ability to worship Allah by seeking the truth, via pondering over the revelation as found in the Quran and hadith. It also tries him by seeing if he does follow the truth and the strongest views when he finally comes upon them.

Second, these differences in interpretation are bound to occur. A person may sincerely be seeking to please Allah and yet come to a conclusion that another finds weak or unacceptable. As long as a person's view does not clearly contradict the Quran or Sunnah and has some basis via some acceptable proof, he, as a person, should be respected. In fact, the mistaken individual will be rewarded by Allah for his efforts if he were sincere, as noted in a hadith quoted earlier. Thus, even though one may disagree with his view and one may even feel the need to refute his view, such acceptable differences may never be allowed to strike at the root of the brotherhood of Islam and enter into the hearts of the Muslims, thereby tearing them apart.



Finally, it is important to note that the Quran, Sunnah and "personal reasoning" are not simply the sources of what is customarily considered "law" today. Instead, many other aspects, such as morality, ethics and behavior, must also be subjected to these same sources. In other words, in reality, these sources are not simply the sources of law but the sources of guidance for a Muslim's actions encompassing every aspect of his life. Thus, for example, how to behave towards one's parents, neighbors and others are also covered by the Quran and Sunnah, as shall be discussed later, although traditional "law" today would not be concerned with such issues. Hence, when Muslim scholars speak of the sources of "law" in Islam they actually mean the sources of complete guidance for human behavior in all aspects of life.

Some of the Goals of Islam

The teachings of Islam are not merely rituals or mysteries that have no rhyme or reason to them. Instead, the revelation has pointed to some very clear, sought after goals. These include the following:

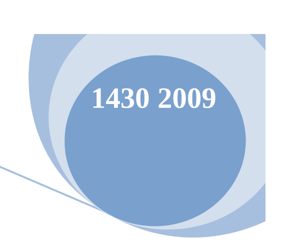
(A)The Worship of Allah Alone

Undoubtedly, the greatest goal of Islam and its greatest contribution to the welfare of humanity is the true and pure worship of Allah alone, without associating any partners with Him.[41] This is in reality the ultimate purpose and goal of a human. Allah says, "And I (Allah) created not the jinns and humans except they should worship Me (Alone)" (51:56). There can be no goal more honorable or noble than this goal for a human being.

Pure monotheism is the only belief system that provides the true answers to the questions that perplex virtually every human: "Where have I come from? Where am I headed? For what purpose do I exist?"

As for the question, "Where have I come from?" Islam explains that humans are honored creatures created by Allah in a very special way and having the freedom to choose to be among the noblest of creatures or among the basest of all creatures. Thus, Allah says, "Verily, We created man of the best

[41] Since this is truly the essence of what Islam is all about, this goal of pure monotheism and being a true servant of Allah alone will be touched upon at different locations in this work.



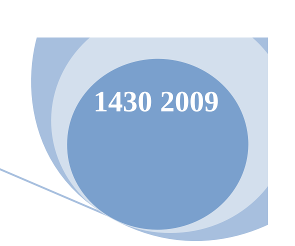
stature (mould), Then We reduced him to the lowest of the low, except those who believe and do righteous deeds, they shall have a reward without end (Paradise)" (95:4-6).

The answer to, "Where I am headed?" is that the human is headed back to a meeting with his Lord and Creator. This momentous occasion will occur after his death in this worldly life. There will be no escape from this encounter. At that time, the human will be fairly and equitably judged. All of the deeds that he performed in this life will be weighed. "That Day mankind will proceed in scattered groups that they may be shown their deeds. So whosoever does good equal to the weight of an atom, shall see it. And whosoever does evil equal to the weight of an atom, shall see it" (99:6-8). This reckoning will start with his most important deed: his attitude toward his Gracious and Merciful Creator who created him, provided for him, sent him guidance, warned him of a punishment for those who turn away from the truth and promised a great reward for those who accepted the truth, were grateful to Him and submitted to Him.

Concerning, "For what purpose do I exist," the human has been created for the noblest of all purposes: the worship of Allah alone or, in other words, to become a true and sincere servant of Allah. One can imagine all sorts of goals that people may have in this world. They may seek to end diseases in this world or bring about world peace. In general, though, those admirable goals are usually tainted.

One may seek them just for egotistic reasons, such as to be remembered or praised as the person who did such and such. They may be sought while the individual turns his back on his Creator, thus showing arrogance and ungrate-fulness as well as demonstrating an ignorance of how truly noble goals can be achieved. In reality, however, all of those goals, which can be considered simp-ly subgoals, fail in comparison to the goal that will lead to excellence in one's soul and one's deeds as well as eternal bliss in the Hereafter. Actually, any truly good goal of this life can only be part of the true worship of Allah.

Fulfilling one's true purpose and being successful upon meeting one's Lord is completely dependent on adhering to a true and unadulterated mo-notheism. This is the monotheism found in Islam. Many people claim to be-

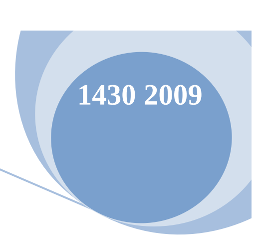


lieve in "monotheism" and the fact that there is only one God. However, on many occasions, this "monotheism" is tainted in many ways. In some early pre-modern civilizations, people began to identify "sons" and "daughters" with God. Unfortunately, this clear contradiction of pure monotheism has been carried over into the modern age by no less a popular religion than Christianity. It is not unusual to hear Christians praise Jesus, thank Jesus and even pray to Jesus, sometimes virtually forgetting "the Father." Although Christians may resort to logical gymnastics to affirm that this is still worshipping only one God, in reality it cannot be considered a true monotheism. In fact, most, if not all, of the contemporary trinitarians will argue that Jesus is co-equal yet unique from the Father. In other words, they have lost pure monotheism.

It may take some time for the new Muslim to realize all the ways in which people associate partners with God and fail to realize true monotheism. The Christian convert to Islam may readily recognize that the above referred to belief in Trinity is certainly not monotheism. At the same time, though, he may not yet realize how accepting priests, for example, as ultimate lawgivers is also a way of associating partners with God.

No priest—nor any human for that matter—has any right to overrule or abrogate any of God's laws. This is also a contradiction of pure monotheism. Hence, Allah says, "They (Jews and Christians) took their rabbis and their monks to be their lords besides Allah [by obeying them in things which they made lawful or unlawful according to their own desires without being ordered by Allah], and (they also took as their Lord) Messiah, son of Mary, while they were commanded to worship none but One God. None has the right to be worshipped but He. Praise and glory be to Him, (far above is He) from having the partners they associate (with Him)" (9:31).

Islam is a religion that establishes pure monotheism completely and eradicates all forms of associating partners with Allah, from the most obvious to the most obscure. (Undoubtedly, Islam is the only religion that can make such a claim.) As the convert learns more and more about his faith, the light of pure monotheism, Allah willing, will shine brighter and brighter in his heart.



(B) Freeing Humans from the Worship of Other Humans or the Worship of Any Other Object

Obviously, this is a corollary of the first principle of worshipping Allah alone. However, it deserves separate mention as humans dominating and subjugating other humans is one of the gravest tragedies in the history of humankind, second perhaps to the tragedy of the humans accepting such a situation and willingly submitting to other humans. There are few things worse than humans submitting themselves, and thus worshipping, other humans. This is completely degrading because all humans share the same essential human nature and weaknesses.

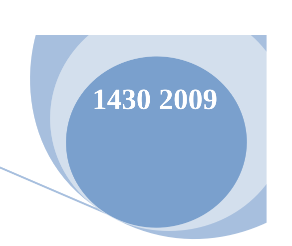
No one has the right to put himself as a God—which would include tyrant, dictator or clergy—over anyone else, with the others subjected to his decrees regardless of whether they are consistent with what Allah has revealed or not.

This goal of Islam was eloquently stated by two of the earliest Muslims. When asked by the Emperor of Persia what brought the Muslims to their lands, two different Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) answered in similar terms: "Allah has sent us to take whoever wishes from the servitude of mankind to the servitude of Allah and from the tightness of this world to its expanse and from the injustice of the ways of life [in this world] to the justice of Islam."[42]

It is interesting to note that humans readily recognize the evils of such dominance of a human over other humans when there is a tyrant ruling others but fail to realize it when a group of elites dominates them and they willingly submit to the manipulation and oppression of that elite, many times via a façade of democracy. In reality, both are evil and can only be remedied by accepting Allah alone as the Lawgiver and ultimate authority. As shall be discussed shortly, it is Allah alone who can lay down just laws and ordinances as He alone is completely free from desires and prejudice.

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[42] Ismaaeel ibn Katheer, *Al-Bidaayah wa al-Nihaayah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, n.d.), vol. 7, pp. 39-40.



There are many things that humans have a tendency to "worship" or become "enslaved" to, ranging from one's own passions, the state or nation to insignificant material wants. Allah describes those who take their own desires as a god: "Have you seen he who has taken as his god his [own] desire, and Allah has sent him astray due to knowledge [that Allah has concerning him] and has set a seal upon his hearing and his heart and put over his vision a veil? So who will guide him after Allah? Will you not then be reminded" (45:23).

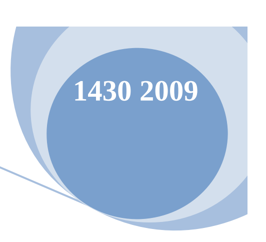
The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "May the slave of *dinars*, *dirhams*, *qateefah* and *khameesah*[43] perish as he is pleased if these things are given to him and if not, he is displeased."[44] This is, in reality, a true form of slavery or servitude—a slavery to something other than Allah. Ibn Taimiyyah wrote,

> If he attains it [that is, what he desires], he is pleased and if he is unable to attain it, he becomes discontented. Such a person is the *'abd* [slave] of what he desires of these matters and he is a slave of it, since slavery and servitude are in reality the enslavement and servitude of the heart. Thus, for whatever enslaves the heart and puts it under its servitude, the heart is then a slave of that object. This is why it is said, "The slave [human] is free as long as he is content [with what Allah has given him] and the free one is a slave as long as he desires."[45]

Islam frees humans from all of such false forms of worship. It does this by freeing their hearts from such overriding wants and desires. It frees the heart from such worship by attaching the heart to Allah alone and building a strong relationship between the individual and Allah (as discussed later). The individual then simply wants to please Allah. Whatever is pleasing to Allah, he is happy with and whatever is displeasing to Allah, he is unhappy with.

This aspect of Islam may be very clear to a new Muslim. He may easily recognize within himself all of those false gods that he used to pursue and "worship" in his pre-Islamic days. His whole life may have revolved around those objects of worship. He would do virtually anything in pursuit of that goal

[43] These four are different forms of money and expensive clothing.
[44] Recorded by al-Bukhari.
[45] [Ahmad ibn Taimiyyah,] *Ibn Taimiyyah's Essay on Servitude* (Birmingham, United Kingdom: al-Hidaayah Publishing and Distribution, 1999), p. 100-101.



regardless of whether such means were ethically sound. Those goals were what made him a person.

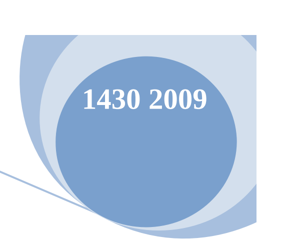
He evaluated his entire life in terms of those goals. If he achieved those goals, that would be his source of happiness. He was truly enslaved by those goals. Now he can understand how those goals were actually taking him away from the worship of Allah alone.

(C) Making Life on Earth Flourishing and Sound

Islam is a beautiful religion that fulfills the needs of both body and soul. A human is made up of both a spiritual as well as a material side. Both sides of a human have to be recognized as "true," with neither of them being ignored or denied. Furthermore, the individual needs guidance for both of these aspects of his personality. If not, one aspect will dominate the other or be in conflict with the other and the individual will never achieve true happiness. For example, there are those who stress the spiritual needs and look down upon the material aspects of this world.

At the same time, though, they are forced to partake in the material aspects of this world that are part of the human's nature. Such individuals are conflicted when they cannot free themselves completely from the material needs that they so look down upon. On the other hand, there are economic systems, like capitalism and socialism, that seek to meet the material needs—in fact, capitalists claim to bring about "the best of all possible worlds. In reality, though, they can leave a great void in the psyche of an individual as his material needs are met and yet he feels empty inside.

Allah is the One who made humans the successors of this earth: "And (remember) when your Lord said to the angels: 'Verily, I am going to place (mankind) generations after generations on earth'" (2:30). Thus, the view of Islam is that humans have been put here on this earth intentionally by God and they are to use the material means to build a positive life in this temporary world, which will eventually lead them to a positive eternal life in the Hereafter. Thus, Allah says, "But seek, with that (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you, the home of the Hereafter, and forget not your portion of legal enjoyment in this world, and do good as Allah has been good to you, and do



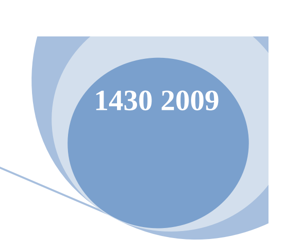
not seek corruption in the land. Verily, Allah does not love the corrupters" (28:77).

In fact, even after finishing the Friday Prayer, one of the most significant acts of worship in Islam, Allah encourages them to go out and seek the bounties of this world: "Then when the (Friday) Prayer is finished, you may disperse through the land, and seek the Bounty of Allah (by working, etc.), and remember Allah much, that you may be successful" (62:10).

In reality, humans are caretakers of this great creation and they are supposed to behave in the proper manner with respect to it. They are not the ultimate owners of it who are free to use it in any way they wish. In fact, they are not supposed to exploit it for their own personal greed or vengeance. They are not supposed to waste the resources of this earth in extravagance and non-beneficial purposes. Instead, they should behave in the manner described by Allah: "Those who, if We give them power in the land, establish the prayer, give the Zakat, enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil" (22:41).

This teaching of Islam is further highlighted by the numerous verses in which Allah forbids the spreading of evil and corruption (*fasaad*) on Earth (as in 28:77 quoted above). Allah also says, "And do not do corruption on the earth, after it has been set in order, and invoke Him with fear and hope; Surely, Allah's Mercy is (ever) near unto the good-doers" (7:56).

Again, "So remember the graces (bestowed upon you) from Allah, and do not go about making mischief on the earth" (7:74). On the other hand, Allah promises a great reward who live their lives by the principle of not promoting or seeking evil and corruption. Allah says, "That home of the Hereafter (i.e. Paradise), We shall assign to those who rebel not against the truth with pride and oppression in the land nor do corruption by committing crimes. And the good end is for the pious" (28:83). Allah makes it clear that when the people stand in front of Him on the Day of Resurrection, those who spread evil on the earth will not be treated as equal to those who spread goodness on this earth. Allah says, "Shall We treat those who believe and do righteous good deeds like those spread corruption on earth? Or shall We treat the pious as criminals?" (38:28).



Unfortunately, what many people do not realize is that the greatest way of spreading corruption and evil on earth is by turning one's back on the revelation from God and encouraging people to forget about what Allah has commanded, thereby following their own wants and desires. Turning away from God and His guidance truly corrupts the individual soul and also corrupts the family, society and entire creation. With a true belief in God removed from one's heart, it is a small step to unethical behavior and unjust practices.

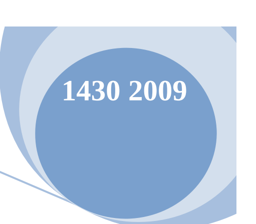
In reality, it is one of Allah's laws that if corruption is allowed to spread, it leads to evils throughout the earth as a wake-up call to humans that they must change their ways. Thus, Allah says, "Evil has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned (by oppression and evil deeds), that Allah may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return (by repenting to Allah, and begging His Pardon)" (30:41). Unfortunately, today very few do wake-up as they put the blame for all evils on everything except the fact that they have turned away from God.

In the end, it is the corruptors and evildoers themselves who will suffer: Allah says, "Those who disbelieved and hinder (men) from the Path of Allah, for them We will add torment over the torment; because they used to spread corruption [by disobeying Allah themselves, as well as ordering others (mankind) to do so]" (16:88). "Those who break Allah's Covenant after ratifying it, and sever what Allah has ordered to be joined, and do mischief on earth, it is they who are the losers" (2:27).

(D) Justice and the Prohibition of Wronging Others

Life on Earth cannot be truly flourishing and sound without justice. Thus, the call to and the implementation of justice is one of the most prominent features of Islam. In numerous places in the Quran, Allah orders the Muslims to fulfill the demands of justice, even if these should go against their own interests or needs.

For example, Allah says, "Verily! Allah commands that you should render back the trusts to those, to whom they are due; and that when you judge between men, you judge with justice. Verily, how excellent is the teaching which He (Allah) gives you! Truly, Allah is Ever All-Hearer, All-Seer" (4:58); "O you



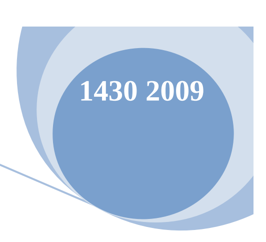
who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to Allah, even though it be against yourselves, or your parents, or your kin, be he rich or poor, Allah is a Better Protector to both (than you). So follow not the lusts (of your hearts), lest you may avoid justice, and if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, verily, Allah is Ever Well-Acquainted with what you do" (4:135); and "O you who believe! Stand out firmly for Allah and be just witnesses and let not the enmity and hatred of others make you avoid justice. Be just: that is nearer to piety, and fear Allah. Verily, Allah is Well-Acquainted with what you do" (5:8).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) demonstrated that nobody is above the law and justice in Islam. One time Usaamah, who was very close and dear to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), was convinced to try to intervene with the Prophet concerning a prescribed punishment and the Prophet told him, "Do you, Usaamah, intervene with respect to one of Allah's prescribed punishments? By Allah, if Fatimah the daughter of [the Prophet] Muhammad were to steal, I would have her hand amputated."[46]

Thus, justice is to be applied to everyone, rich and poor, young and old, ally and enemy, Muslim and non-Muslim and so forth. In reality, if this were not the case and some sort of double standard were to be used, it would not be true justice. A Muslim is required to be just to everyone, friend or foe, and even to his own soul. He is not allowed to wrong his own soul as wronging one's own soul is not "freedom" but it is one of the worst forms of injustice. Actually, a true Muslim has been ordered to be even more than just; he must also be benevolent and forbearing. Thus, Allah says, "Verily, Allah enjoins justice and beneficence, and giving (help) to kith and kin, and He forbids all lewd acts, evil and oppression. Thus He admonishes you, that you may take heed" (16:90).

The establishment of justice and working for justice is one of the heavy responsibilities upon the Muslim community as a whole. It is by this way that the Muslims are witnesses to the rest of mankind that this is the true religion of Allah. Thus, Allah has said, "Thus We have made you a *wasat* (just) nation, that you be witnesses over mankind and the Messenger be a witness over

[46] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



you" (2:143). One of the meanings of the word *wasat* is just and balanced, avoiding the extremes that always accompany exploitation and injustice.[47]

Finally, there is a very important relationship between justice and following the revelation from Allah. Allah alone is the only one with the impartiality and just nature to lay down laws that will not favor one class of people over the other (in particular, the powerful over the weak). He is also the only one with the complete knowledge that allows Him to lay down laws that are truly just. Someone may have sincere intentions but due to lacking perfect knowledge of the human psyche and human social interactions may invoke laws that are actually unfair and unjust. Thus, once again, if a person is truly interested in pure and adulterated justice, he has no option but to turn to the revelation from Allah and the law from Him.

Ibn al-Qayyim therefore wrote, "Allah sent His Messengers and revealed His Books so that the people could live by justice. It is the same justice and balance upon which the earth and the heavens are balanced. Wherever the signs of true justice are apparent and clear, therein also lies the law of Allah and His religion."[48] Fortunately, for all of humankind, the working of the cosmos is according to the justice and truth from Allah and is not based on the desires of humans. Hence, Allah says, "And if the truth had been in accordance with their desires, verily, the heavens and the earth, and whosoever is therein would have been corrupted! Nay, We have brought them their reminder, but they turn away from their reminder" (23:71).

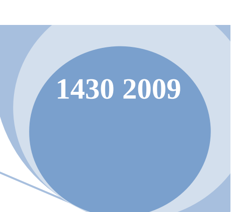
The justice that is so essential to Islam extends beyond this life to the Hereafter. In other words, Allah will judge all individuals in the most just way and will not wrong anyone in the least. Part of this justice includes the fact that no individual will bear the burden of another's sin and no one will be held responsible for what is beyond his means.

Thus, Allah says, "Say: Shall I seek a lord other than Allah, while He is the Lord of all things? No person earns any (sin) except against himself (only), and no bearer of burdens shall bear the burden of another. Then unto your Lord is

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[47] See al-Qurtubi, vol. 2, p. 153.

[48] Muhammad ibn al-Qaayim, *Al-Turuq al-Hukumiyyah fi al-Siyaasah al-Shar'iyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah), p. 14.



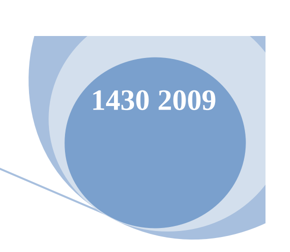
your return, so He will tell you that wherein you have been differing" (6:164); "Whoever goes right, then he goes right only for the benefit of his ownself. And whoever goes astray, then he goes astray to his own loss. No one laden with burdens can bear another's burden. And We never punish until We have sent a Messenger (to give warning)" (17:15); "Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope. He gets reward for that (good) which he has earned, and he is punished for that (evil) which he has earned" (2:286); and, "Allah puts no burden on any person beyond what He has given him. Allah will grant after hardship, ease" (65:7).

Justice does not only have a positive aspect to it (the fulfilling and restoring of rights after they have been infringed upon), it must also have a "negative" component to it: the prohibition of wronging others. Islam places great emphasis on the avoidance of wronging of others in the first place. Thus, the Prophet stated that God has said, "O My servants, I have forbidden wrongdoing for Myself and I have made it forbidden for you. Therefore, do not wrong one another."[49] Ibn Taimiyyah states that this statement covers all of the religion. Everything that Allah has forbidden is, in one way or another, a type of *dhulm*, while everything that He has ordered is a form of *adl* or justice.[50] In fact, Allah has said, "Indeed, We have sent Our messengers with clear proofs, and revealed with them the Scripture and the Balance (justice) that mankind may establish justice. And We brought forth iron wherein is mighty power as well as many benefits for mankind, that Allah may test those who will help Him and His messengers, while unseen. Verily, Allah is All-Strong, All-Mighty" (57:25).

Thus, the messengers were sent, books revealed and the balance made so that humankind may establish and live by justice. Furthermore, iron has been created so that it may be used for the sake of truth and justice. The book guides to justice and the sword and iron assists it.

There is yet another very important relationship between justice and Islam. In order for humans to be truly just, they need some internal mechanism that drives them to do what is right. It is very easy to be swayed and impartial

[49] Recorded by Muslim.
[50] Ibn Taimiya, *Majmoo*, vol. 18, p. 166.



when one's wealth, family, nation, status or honor is at stake. Many can recognize the injustice in others but fail to or refuse to recognize any injustice on their own part.

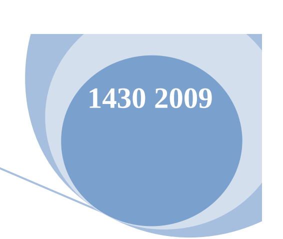
In such cases, their desires will not allow them to recognize the truth. However, once true faith enters an individual's heart, the situation changes completely. The person understands that Allah wants justice from him. He also knows that Allah is aware of even the most minute of his actions or intention. Allah demands justice and has forbidden all forms of injustice. The true believer, then, will not give preference to his desires, his wealth, his family, his nation—or whatever—over what Allah demands from him in the form of justice. He knows that he will meet Allah and he will desire to do so with a clear conscience. Thus, he will work for justice and will accept nothing less than it.

Many converts today come from individualistic societies, where justice is sometimes overridden by the desire to serve one's own interests. This has no place in Islam. Again, even if it is against one's own interest, a Muslim must always stand out firmly and bravely for the sake of truth and justice.

(E)True Peace

The Light and Guidance from Allah is the path to true peace. Allah says, "Indeed, there has come to you from Allah a Light and a clear Book wherewith Allah guides all those who seek His Good Pleasure to ways of peace, and He brings them out of darkness by His Will unto light and guides them to a Straight Way" (5:15-16). In fact, Allah is calling humans to the abode of eternal peace: "Allah calls to the home of peace (Paradise) and guides whom He wills to a Straight Path" (10:25).

True and complete peace can only be had when the individuals themselves achieve internal peace. This results from Islam or the true submission to Allah alone. This is the only way of life consistent with the nature of human beings. In fact, this is what can be called the "true life." Thus, Allah says, "O you who believe! Answer Allah (by obeying Him) and (His) Messenger when he calls you to that which will give you life" (8.24).



Knowing Allah is what can bring about true contentment in the soul. If the individual does not know his Creator, his soul will always be yearning for something that is missing in his life. Unless there is contentment in the soul and the heart, the individual can never achieve true contentment. All of the wealth and the goods of this world will not be able to bring the human such true contentment. The Prophet said, "True richness is not via much property and belongings but true richness is in self-contentment."[51] He also said, "True richness is the richness of the heart. True poverty is the poverty of the heart."[52]

Once an individual is at peace with himself and free of any internal agitations, he can then enter into truly peaceful relations with others. This starts with those closest to him in his family and extends to his neighbors and others in the community, eventually extending to all of humankind as a whole. Thus, Islam establishes an entire social structure in which people interact with others, based on relationships, rights and obligations, in ways that bring about a peaceful coexistence.[53] Children recognize the rights of their parents upon them while parents recognize their roles towards their children. Husbands and wives come together not as competitors but as partners cooperating to produce a home filled with peace and love.

Indeed, Allah points to this relationship that He has created as a great sign: "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed signs for a people who reflect" (30:21). Thus, Allah has laid down stringent laws that protect the sanctity of the home, such as the laws concerning adultery, fornication and slander. The reason is that the home is truly the foundation for the society as a whole. If there is no peace in the home, one can hardly expect that people will exit their home in a troubled state and be peaceful, fulfilling members of society.

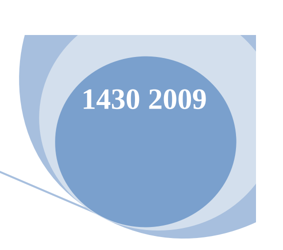
Since the guidance of Islam covers not only what is traditionally known as "law" but also ethical behavior and conduct, Islam provides detailed guid-

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[51] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[52] Recorded by ibn Hibbaan. According to al-Albaani, it is authentic. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer*, #7816.

[53] Some of the aspects of family relationships and relationships between spouses will be discussed in more detail later.



ance for the manner in which members of a society should interact with one another. There is a great emphasis on mutual respect, with each member of society realizing that he is part of a larger unity entailing rights and obligations. This mutual feeling produces a society that is filled with peace, wherein each individual looks after the welfare and needs of the other members of society.

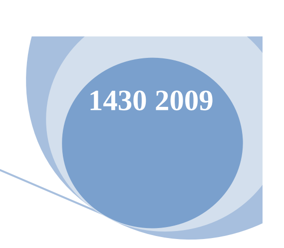
Thus, when Islam is enacted, the individual finds peace all around him, from within himself and throughout the entire society. In fact, even world peace can only truly come about when there is justice. In recent years, more and more people have realized this fact and emphasize, "There is No Peace Without Justice." (Justice is often a slogan used when going to war but it is usually not more than that, a slogan.) But there can be no true justice or peace until people raise themselves above national or ethnic economic or political interests. True justice can only occur when people dedicate themselves to Allah, applying His guidance while removing their egos and desires from their decisions.

In the Hereafter, of course, it will only be through believing in God and following His guidance that one will achieve eternal peace. Again, Allah makes it very clear that this is what He is actually calling the humans to: "Allah calls to the home of peace (Paradise) and guides whom He wills to a Straight Path" (10:25).

A Final Point on Some of the Goals of Islam

One will readily note that all of the goals of Islam are highly interconnected. This is quite logical. Actually, they all flow from the foundation of true monotheism. When a person embodies the teachings of Islamic monotheism, he then frees himself from worshipping anybody else or anything else.

Furthermore, he will then lead his life in this world in a way that is best for society and civilization. He will work for justice and ensure that neither he nor others wrong others. In the end, he will find true peace and will be able to pass that along to others. But all of this must start with the true internalization of pure monotheism, where one worships and submits to Allah, sincerely and devoutly practicing the religion of Allah in this life.



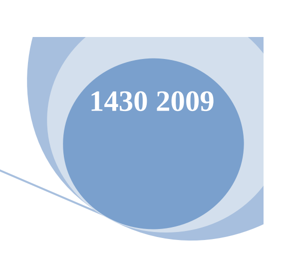
Thus, clearly, once a person understands, accepts and applies the true concept of Islamic monotheism concept in his life, the other aspects are achieved as corollaries to this main goal. One the other hand, without true monotheism, the other goals cannot be achieved, even at a superficial level. Hence, it is understandable that, in essence, all of the Quran is concerning *tauheed* or pure monotheism. The commentator on one of the famous expositions of Islamic belief, *al-Aqeedah al-Tahaawiyya,* also noted that all of the Quran is actually a discussion of pure monotheism (*tauheed*):

Most of the chapters in the Quran are concerned with the two types of *tauheed* [54]; in fact, every chapter in the Quran [is concerned with *tauheed*]. The Quran either reports about Allah's names and attributes. This is the *tauheed* that one must have knowledge about and that is reported. Or the Quran calls to His worship, associating no partner with Him [in that worship] and abandoning any other idol other than Him. This is the *tauheed* of intention and will. Or the Quran orders, prohibits or commands [His] obedience.

These are essential aspects of *tauheed* and part of its completeness. Or the Quran reports about how [Allah] honors the people [who adhere to] *tauheed* and what He does for them in this world and what He graciously bestows on them in the Hereafter. That is the reward for [adhering to] *tauheed*. Or [the Quran] reports about the polytheists and how He treats them in this world and what kind of punishment they will receive in the end. That is the punishment for those who abandon the aspects of *tauheed*.[55]

[54] What is meant by the "two types of *tauheed*" is *tauheed* with respect to (1) what one believes in and acknowledges as true and (2) one's devotions and worship in his life.

[55] Sadr al-Deen Abu al-Izz al-Hanafi, *Sharh al-Tahaawiyya fi al-Aqeeda al-Salafiyyah* (Fairfax, VA: Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences in America, forthcoming), p. 35. ????



The Excellent Features of Islam

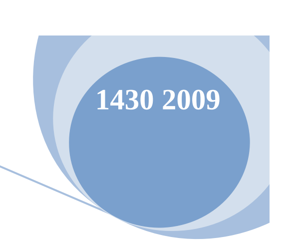
(1) Pure Monotheism:

As noted earlier, this is the main goal of Islam. It is also one of its excellent features. Islam frees the human from trying to serve varied objects of worship. His life becomes clear and easy to follow. He has one Lord and one path to follow. He does not associate anyone or anything with God.

In a number of places in the Quran, Allah juxtaposes the ramifications and effects of the correct belief in Allah with the effects of different incorrect beliefs. In the following passage, Allah has beautifully described the fruits of the correct belief as well as the results of all false beliefs. Allah says, "Don't you see how Allah sets forth a parable? A goodly word is like a goodly tree, whose root is firmly fixed, and its branches (reach) to the heavens, it brings forth its fruit at all times, by the leave of its Lord. So Allah sets forth parables for men, in order that they may receive admonition. And the parable of an evil word is that of any evil tree. It is torn up by the root from the surface of the earth. It has no stability. Allah will establish in strength those who believe, with the word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter; but Allah will leave to stray those who do wrong. Allah does what He wills" (14:24-27).

It is narrated that ibn Abbaas said, "The goodly word is the testimony that there is none worthy of worship except Allah."[56] This verse shows that pure monotheism or proper belief is the foundation upon which all other good is built. It is a foundation that continues to give and give, with its proceeds reaching the highest limits. Such is the way with the true faith; it continually and perpetually benefits the person in this life and eternally in the Hereafter. It also follows that the stronger and better supported the foundation or roots, the greater will be the fruits. On the other hand, the false beliefs, such as associating partners with God, have no solid ground to them. Indeed, they are not much more than an illusion in the sense that they can never bear the produce that its followers claim or believe in.

[56] Quoted in ibn Katheer, *Tafseer* (Daar Taibah), vol. 4, p. 491.



It is therefore no secret and no wonder that the first portion of the Prophet's mission, as demonstrated by the revelations that he received in Makkah, concentrated on purification of belief. It was dedicated to removing all forms of ignorance, superstition and false creeds, as a human's soul cannot rest if it is torn in many directions, seeking after numerous ultimate goals.

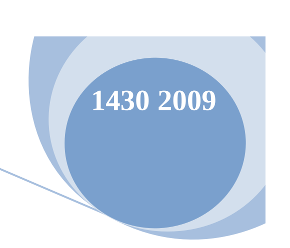
Allah has beautifully described the similitude of those who fail to see that their soul can only recognize one true object of worship: "Allah puts forth a similitude: a [slave] man belong to many partners disputing with one another [like those who worship more than one god] and a [slave] man belonging to only one man [like those who worship only Allah]. Are those two equal in comparison? All the praises are to Allah. Yet most of them know not" (39:29). From an Islamic perspective, there is no way for a person to please more than one god as, by the Islamic definition of the word "God", God must be the thing that is foremost in one's heart.

Actually, when a person realizes that he has only one, clear goal, the effects upon his soul are profound. He need not chase after an endless array of goals, never being able to satisfy or achieve any of them completely. (Indeed, many times people's goals are contradictory and they can never achieve all of them.) His energies need not be exhausted trying to serve a myriad of goals. When he has one goal and one goal alone, he can easily gauge whether he is moving towards achieving that goal or not. He can put all of his energy and thought into working towards that one ultimate goal. He can be certain about his goal and his path will be clear. Hence, he has no reason to be filled with doubt or confusion.

Then, as he moves closer and closer to that one ultimate goal, he can experience true joy and contentment. All of this is part of the beauty and the bounty when humans recognize, receive and accept true monotheism, the only faith system consistent with their own creation and nature.

(2) The Religion of Allah

Islam is not a man-made philosophy or religion. Its teachings come directly from the Creator. It is the guidance that the Creator, via His Mercy, has bestowed upon humankind.



In reality, God can be the only one who knows how He is to be worshipped. He is the only one who knows what way of living is pleasing to Him. Philosophers and others may ponder over this question of what way of life is pleasing to God but, in reality, the details of that way of life are beyond the scope of human reasoning and experimentation. What humans, independent of revelation from God, declare to be the best mode of worshipping God is not what is necessarily most pleasing to God but only most pleasing to the individual who devised it. Thus, only God knows, for example, the manner by which one should pray to Him.

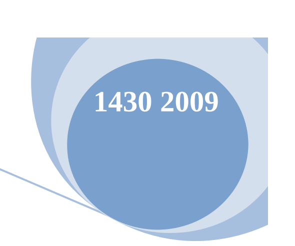
Being the only way of life that God has actually approved of, it will also be the only way of life that will be acceptable to Him in the end. Earlier two important verses of the Quran were quoted that point to this conclusion: "Truly, the religion with Allah is Islam (submission to Him)" (3:19); "And whoever seeks a religion other than Islam, it will never be accepted of him, and in the Hereafter he will be one of the losers" (3:85).

This point cannot be overemphasized. The ultimate question must be: What is acceptable and pleasing to God? No one can seriously claim with any real proof that any path other than that based on Allah's guidance is pleasing to Him. Such a claim would be baseless and absurd.

(3) Comprehensiveness

Islam is comprehensive in many ways. It is comprehensive in the sense that it applies to all human beings and is applicable by all regardless of where or what time they may be living. Islam or submission to God is the true way of life from the time of the first human until the time of last human on this Earth.[57] Furthermore, Islam is for all classes of people. Islam is just as much

[57] Actually, the comprehensiveness of Islam, or the way of life that is submission to God alone, extends beyond humans to include all creation, animate or inanimate. Allah says, "And to Allah prostate all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth, of the living, moving creatures and the angels, and they are not proud [i.e. they worship their Lord (Allah) with humility]" (16:49); "See you not that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth, and the sun, and the moon, and the stars, and the mountains, and the trees, and moving living creatures, and many of humankind? But there are many (men) on whom the punishment is justified. And whomsoever Allah disgraces, none can honor him. Verily! Allah does what He wills" (22:18); "The seven heavens and the earth and all that is therein glorify Him and there is not a thing but



relevant to the most knowledgeable scientist as well as the illiterate Bedouin. Allah says concerning the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), "Say (O Muhammad to the people), 'O mankind! Verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah' (7:158). Another verse reads, "And We have not sent you (O Muhammad) except as a giver of glad tidings and a warner to all mankind" (34:28). Among the Prophet's followers were the rich and poor, nobles and weak, literate and illiterate. All of them were able to apply Islam and thereby, Allah willing, earn the pleasure of God.

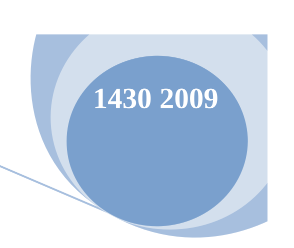
Islam also covers both this life and the Hereafter. Islam is not a religion that is only concerned with the Hereafter. Islam offers complete and practical guidance for the affairs of this world as well. As noted earlier, one of the goals of Islam is to establish a sound and proper society in this life. As for the Hereafter, goodness therein is dependent completely upon Islam and working towards the Hereafter in the proper way. Allah may give anyone some of the goods of this world but He reserves the good of the Hereafter only for those who are pious believers.

Allah says, "Those who desire the life of this world and its glitter, to them We shall pay (the price of) their deeds therein, without diminution. They are those for whom there is nothing in the Hereafter but the Fire: vain are the designs they frame therein, and void are the deeds that they do" (11:15-16). In another verse, Allah says, "Whoever desires the immediate [worldly gratifications], We hasten for him from it what We will to whom We please. Then We have made for him Hell, [in] which he will burn, censured and banished. But whoever desires the Hereafter and exerts the effort due to it while he is a believer, it is those whose effort is appreciated" (17:18-20).

Islam also attends to all of the various components of a human. It is concerned with the human's spirit, intellect, body, beliefs, actions and morality. It protects the human from the diseases of the heart as well as from the diseases of the body and diseases of society as a whole. Thus, one can find guidance concerning the disease of arrogance that appears in the heart, guidance directing humans to balanced eating and drinking without extravagance and guidance steering humans away from corruption and social diseases such as adul-

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glorifies His Praise. But you understand not their glorification. Truly, He is Ever Forbearing, Oft-Forgiving" (17:44).



tery and the like. In essence, Islam guides humans to a balanced life in which no component is ignored or neglected. Instead, each component receives the attention that it deserves and requires.

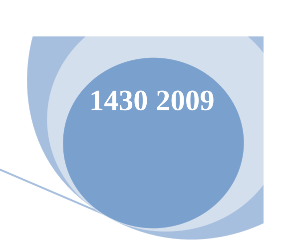
Islam is also comprehensive in the sense that it covers all aspects of a person's life, from ritual worship to ethics and moral behavior to acts of business and government. Nothing, by the grace and mercy of Allah, has been neglected. There is no reason for anyone to feel lost concerning any area of his life. No matter what the issue, he will be able to find some guidance to help him.

For the new Muslim, he must accept Islam in all of its comprehensiveness. He is not free to pick and choose what aspect of Islam he likes. Concerning such behavior, Allah says, "Do you believe in part of the Scripture and disbelieve in part thereof? And what is the reward of those who do so save ignominy in the life of the world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be consigned to the most grievous doom. For Allah is not unaware of what you do. Such are those who buy the life of the world at the price of the Hereafter: Their punishment will not be lightened, neither will they have support" (2:85-86).

For example, he cannot restrict his Islam simply to the beliefs and the ritual acts of worship while rejecting what Islam has to say about marriage, business dealings, alcohol and drugs and so forth. Yes, it is true that one cannot expect another individual to become a perfect Muslim over night. However, the goal, the understanding and the acceptance in one's heart of the entirety of Islam is the main issue.

The beautiful and consistent comprehensiveness of Islam is another sign that this religion must be revealed by God. It is impossible for humans, even in groups, to comprehend all of the components of this creation in such a way as to give comprehensive guidance for every aspect of life. Thus, Sayyid Qutb wrote,

When a human being tries to construct a metaphysical concept or a system of life through his own efforts, this concept or system cannot be comprehensive. It can only be partially valid, good for one time and place but not for other times and other places, and appropriate for one set of circumstances but



not for another. Furthermore, even in tackling a single problem, he is incapable of looking at it from all possible sides and of taking into consideration all the consequences of the proposed solution, since every problem extends in space and time and is connected with precedents and antecedents beyond the scope of observation and comprehension of human beings. We therefore conclude that no philosophy and no system of life produced by human thought can have the characteristic of "comprehensiveness." At most, it can cover a segment of human life and can be valid for a temporary period. Because of its limited scope, it is always deficient in many respects, and because of its temporariness it is bound to cause problems that require modifications and changes in the original philosophy or system of life. Peoples and nations basing their social, political and economic systems on human philosophies are forever confronted with contradictions and "dialectics."[58]

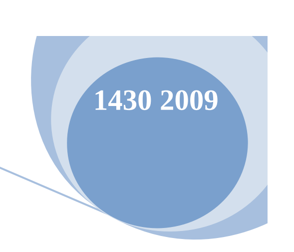
(4) Taking into Consideration the Welfare of this World and the Hereafter

As noted earlier, Islam is not a religion that is simply concerned with the Hereafter or what can be referred to as the "spiritual side" of life.[59] Instead, it promotes the welfare of humans in both this world and the Hereafter. Thus, Allah says, "Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he (or she) is a true believer verily, to him We will give a good life (in this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision), and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do" (16:97).

Many scholars have studied the Islamic Law in its entirety and have noted that the Law is geared toward achieving specific goals in this world (as well as the obvious goals of the Hereafter). One can divide the "wants" and "needs" of this world into three categories: necessities, needs and amenities. The necessities of life are those components of life that are required to allow one to truly have a "life."

[58] Sayyid Qutb, *The Islamic Concept and Its Characteristics* (American Trust Publications, 1991), pp. 85-86.

[59] In reality, as shall be demonstrated shortly while discussing the building of a strong relationship between the Creator and the created, there is no need for anything to be considered out of the "spiritual side" of life. For the time being, though, the traditional division between the material and spiritual is being followed here.



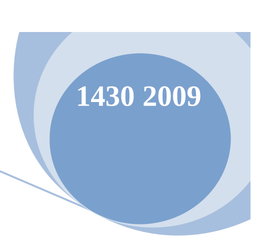
In other words, without them, one may be so miserable that he may wish he was no longer living. Beyond those necessities become the "needs," which make life much more bearable, although one can still live without them. Then comes the amenities, which make life comfortable and more enjoyable.

Islamic Law, coming from the Creator, has identified and emphasized what are the true necessities of life. When one studies the laws found in Islam and what seems to be the wisdom behind them, one finds that they have been laid down to establish, protect, reinforce and perpetuate these necessities. After these are truly protected and established, the Law then seeks to meet the needs of life. After due consideration is given to the necessities and needs, the Law then seeks to provide amenities for the ease of humankind.

Space does not allow a detailed discussion of these three categories. Therefore, only the five necessities of life identified via Islamic Law will be briefly touched upon here.

The necessities of life as envisioned by Islamic Law are: (1) religion, (2) life, (3) familial ties and relationships, (4) mental capacity and (5) wealth and property. In one eloquent passage of the Quran, which is representative of the style of the Quran, Allah touches upon all of these goals of Islamic Law:

"Say [O Muhammad to the people]: 'Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited you: Join not anything in worship with Him; be good and dutiful to your parents; kill not your children because of poverty - We provide sustenance for you and for them; come not near to shameful sins (or illegal sexual intercourse), whether committed openly or secretly, and kill not anyone whom Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause (according to Islamic law). This He has commanded you that you may understand. And come not near to the orphan's property, except to improve it, until he (or she) attains the age of full strength; and give full measure and full weight with justice. We burden not any person, but that which he can bear. And whenever you give your word, say the truth even if a near relative is concerned, and fulfill the Covenant of Allah, This He commands you, that you may remember.' Verily, this (way) is my Straight Path, so follow it, and follow not (other) paths, for they will separate you away



from His Path. This He has ordained for you that you may become pious" (6:151-153).[60]

The most important of these goals is that of religion. From an Islamic perspective, if people do not have religion and a sound relationship with their Lord they cannot have a healthy life. Hence, one is expected to be willing to risk or sacrifice one's own life for the sake of religion.

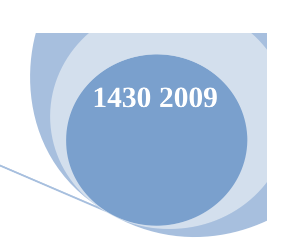
In fact, Allah says, "Is he who was dead (without Faith by ignorance and disbelief) and We gave him life (by knowledge and Faith) and set for him a light (of Belief) whereby he can walk amongst men, like him who is in the darkness (of disbelief, polytheism and hypocrisy) from which he can never come out? Thus it is made fair-seeming to the disbelievers that which they used to do" (6:122). Many of the laws of Islam are obviously geared toward the preservation of this ultimate goal, such as the institution of congregational prayer and so on. Next in importance comes life itself. Thus, for example, the law of retribution and the death penalty are part of Islamic law. These laws are not meant simply for the sake of punishment. Such laws are actually meant to protect life, as Allah says, "And there is (a saving of) life for you in the Law of Equality in punishment, O men of understanding, that you may become the pious" (2:179).

Concerning familial ties mention has already been made of the stringent laws governing adultery, fornication and slander. With respect to the protection of wealth, one finds that under specific conditions, the hand of the thief is to be amputated. The prohibition of wasting wealth, extravagance and interest are all for the sake of preserving wealth in the proper manner. With respect to the protection of mental capacity, all intoxicants have been prohibited and strict punishments are enacted for violating such laws.

(5) Ease and Absence of Hardship in the Law

One of the clearest aspects of Islamic Law is the goal of bringing about ease upon the humans and avoiding hardship for them while maintaining positive results for all. Hence, this is not a goal independent of all other goals. In

[60] Another similar passage is al-Israa 23-36.



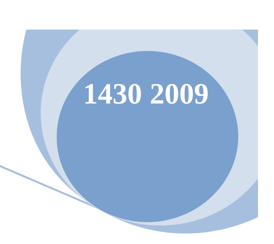
other words, there are a myriad of goals, such as mercy, justice, equity, balance and so forth. Within the context of meeting those goals, though, Allah, in His Mercy and Wisdom, has laid down a law for humans that provides ease for them and is free of any unwarranted hardships.[61]

Numerous verses of the Quran point to this very important feature of Islam. For example, Allah says, "Allah burdens not a person beyond his scope. He gets reward for that (good) which he has earned, and he is punished for that (evil) which he has earned" (2:286). This is part of Allah's great mercy, as no one could hold Allah responsible if He burdened humans with actions beyond their capacity. Allah also says, "Allah intends for you ease, and He does not want to make things difficult for you" (2:185). Allah also says, "Allah does not want to place you in difficulty, but He wants to purify you, and to complete His Favor on you that you may be thankful" (5:6). In yet another verse, Allah says, "Strive hard in Allah's Cause as you ought to strive. He has chosen you and has not laid upon you in religion any hardship" (22:78).

Allah sent the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as a mercy for all of mankind, as noted earlier. Part of his role was to relax some of the laws put on the previous peoples due to their recalcitrance or put on them by their own religious leaders and scholars.

Thus, Allah describes the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in the following fashion: "Those who follow the Messenger, the Prophet who can neither read nor write whom they find written with them in the Torah and the Gospel—he commands them for what is good and forbids them what is evil; he allows them as lawful all good matters, and prohibits them as unlawful all filthy matters; he releases them from their heavy burdens and from the fetters that were upon them. So those who believe in him, honor him, help him, and follow the light which has been sent down with him, it is they who will be successful" (7:157). Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be

[61] The words "unwarranted hardships" are used here because any obligatory act could be claimed to be a hardship. Thus, some have actually claimed that prayer five times a day is too much of a burden and a hardship. However, like any job or goal in life, one must undergo some effort to achieve one's final goal. This effort or "hardship" is justified and beneficial. This type of effort or "hardship" is not what is being described above. In fact, life cannot truly function without such "hardships." The above is discussing hardship via which there is no true or overriding benefit or justification.



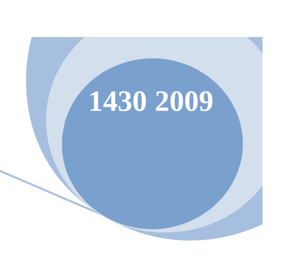
upon him) also said, "I have not been sent with Judaism or Christianity but I have been sent with the true monotheism and easy religion."[62]

This principle of ease and removing hardship is exhibited throughout many branches of Islamic law. Even becoming a Muslim requires no special indoctrination or ceremony. In fact, it does not even require anyone's approval or supervision. With respect to the acts of worship, one finds numerous rules demonstrating this principle.[63] For example, an individual is not required to perform the pilgrimage to Makkah if he does not have the means to do so—in other words, if it would be too much of a financial burden.

The traveler is allowed to shorten and combine his prayers in order to lessen his burden—but he still must perform the prayer as that effort is definitely beneficial for him. With respect to the fast of Ramadan, those who are traveling or ill can delay their fasts and make up those days after the month is finished. Those facing starvation are allowed to eat foods, such as pork, that are normally forbidden. Of great importance is the issue of repentance. In Islam, repentance never requires one to go to a priest and beg forgiveness for one's sins. It is simply a matter of faithfully returning to Allah and attempting to redress any wrong one has done.

For the new Muslim, it is important to realize that the relaxation in the laws under certain circumstances does not open the door to them to relax any law for themselves in the name of the fact that the religion desires ease. Such laws must be based on the Quran and Sunnah and will be known to those who are knowledgeable. Furthermore, as mentioned in a footnote earlier, it is referring to unwarranted hardship or effort. The effort or "hardship" required to perform prayers five times a day, fast for a month, and so on, are, in general within the means of most humans and the great benefits they should produce are well worth their effort.

[62] Recorded by Ahmad.
[63] The ritual acts of worship have to do with what the scholars have termed the "rights of Allah," as opposed to what can be termed the rights of individuals or of humans. In order not to cause undue harm to other individuals, the laws related to the ritual acts of worship are many times more flexible than the laws related to the rights of others.



(6) A Strong Relationship between the Creator and the Created

The goals and the teachings of Islam go well beyond any legal issues in this world. Islam seeks to create a certain type of individual, an individual who has a strong and proper relationship with Allah. There are a number of important points related to this feature.

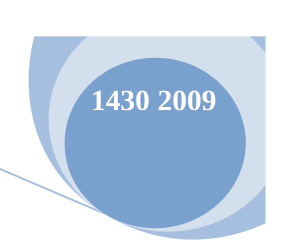
First, in Islam, the Muslim has a direct relationship with Allah. Allah says, "And when My slaves ask you (O Muhammad) concerning Me, then (answer them): I am indeed near (to them by My Knowledge). I respond to the invocations of the supplicant when he calls on Me (without any mediator or intercessor). So let them obey Me and believe in Me, so that they may be led aright" (2:186). Allah also says, "And your Lord said: 'Invoke Me, I will respond to your (invocation)" (40:60).

Thus, there is no priestly class in Islam. The individual prays directly to God without going through an intermediary. When a Muslim seeks forgiveness, he seeks it directly from God with no human having the authority to tell him if his repentance is sufficient or accepted by God. When a Muslim is in need, he turns directly to God, without having to put his trust and reliance in anyone other than God. When a Muslim wants to read the revelation and guidance from God, he goes directly to the Quran and Sunnah, being able to read them directly by himself.[64]

There are no demigods or clergy that he has to go through. Everything is actually between the individual and his Lord. This direct relationship with Allah is very empowering and reassuring. There is none other than Allah that he is worshipping and there is none who can interfere with his worship of Allah. Under all circumstances, Allah is available to him and he can turn to Him at any time to ask for help, guidance and forgiveness.

This direct relationship with Allah extends to all of an individual's deeds. The Muslim knows that Allah not only sees his outward actions but that Allah is also fully aware of every intention and feeling that is in his heart. Thus, due

[64] For centuries in various parts of the Christian world, the masses were not allowed to read the Bible. That privilege was restricted to the clergy.



to his direct relationship with Allah, the Muslim attempts to perform every deed with the intention of pleasing God. In this way, even the most mundane activity can become an act pleasing to God, if done with the right conditions in the heart. The Muslim sets upon his day, via his close relationship with his Lord, by ensuring that he performs acts that are permissible in the sight of his Lord. That is the Muslim's goal and intention and as he is conscious of this goal, he is pleasing Allah by the simplest of deeds. Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Everything you spend for the sake of Allah will be rewarded, even if it were a morsel you put in your wife's mouth."[65]

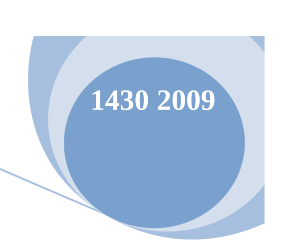
When one understands this concept of his close relationship to God and the ability to the transform even mundane activities into acts that are pleasing to God, his whole outlook and behavior completely change. He begins to perform each act differently, realizing that he is doing it for the sake of God. Unfortunately, there are many in this world who are completely negligent of this point.

In *Madaarij al-Saalikeen*, ibn al-Qayyim stated, "The most exclusive [group of] people who get close to Allah are those who change the nature of their permissible deeds into acts of obedience to Allah." He also said, "The customary-mundane deeds of those people who truly know Allah are acts of worship [for them] while the ritual acts of worship are customary deeds for the masses."[66] What he said is very true. Unfortunately, many among the masses of Muslims approach the prayers, fasting and other deeds as common daily practices that they must perform simply because it is part of the culture or way of life. They have no strong intention in their hearts or feeling of doing the act for the sake of Allah. If the quality of the act is poor, it does not matter much to them because they are doing it just to finish.

Hence, these important rites of worship become simply customary with no meaning or effect to them. The one who truly knows Allah is at the opposite extreme. Even the "mundane" deeds he performs are filled with purpose and intent. Hence, they become acts of worship that are pleasing to Allah.

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[65] Recorded by al-Bukhari.
[66] Quoted in Saalih al-Alayuwi, *Mabaahith fi al-Niyyah* (no publication information given), p. 15.



Thus, for example, even when a person goes to sleep he does so with the intention of reviving himself such that he can work again for the sake of Allah. Thereby, his sleep even becomes an act of worship of Allah.

Actually, one can take this discussion even one step further. Allah says in the Quran, "Every moment He has a matter to bring forth" (55:29). In other words, at every moment, Allah is creating, distributing, providing, bringing forth life and death and so on. However, in general nowadays, the individual does not see Allah behind all of these actions around him.

The individual today has become desensitized and thinks that all of these things simply occur on their own due to some independent laws of nature. In reality, that is not true. These "laws of nature" are nothing more than Allah's activity at every second and moment. In numerous places in the Quran, Allah asks humans to observe the cosmos around them. For example, Allah brings the reader's attention to the tiny bee or the movement of the shadows.[67] Muhammad Qutb notes that Allah's goal was not to present a scientific lesson in such passages. They are to awaken the human to what is really going on and to tie his heart and everyday activities to his Lord and Creator. Qutb writes,

> Humankind's concentration on the apparent cause has distracted them from seeing the greater reality behind it: the will of Allah who says to something, "Be," and it is. They ignore that greater will and call the laws, "natural laws" and they say that they are fixed and inevitable. They are stupefied by such limited experiences and therefore Allah is actually distanced from their hearts. This is where the Quranic expression begins, taking them from where they are stupefied and distanced from Allah and taking them back to Allah…[68]

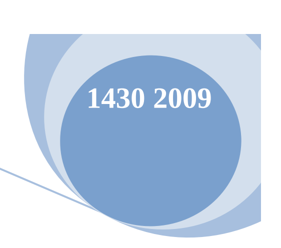
Qutb then writes,

> Science tells us, based on the outward causes that we see, that the existence of the sun and the rotation of the earth around it is the cause of the "movement" of the shadows. But the Quranic expression tells us that it is the will of Allah that moves the shadows in the first place and then the sun is

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[67] For example, Allah says, "Have you not seen how your Lord spread the shadow? If He willed, He could have made it still then We have made the sun its guide" (25:45).

[68] Muhammad Qutb, *Diraasaat Quraaniyyah* (Beirut: Dar al-Shurooq, 1982), p. 42.



placed as a guide for the shadow. Thus, the apparent cause is not the original source but actually comes afterwards… Indeed, it comes later, by the word “then”, after Allah decided this matter by His will, saying to something Be and it is.[69]

In fact, Qutb argues, the end result of this Quranic approach is very clear. In reality, the knowledge that one has about, for example, the bee or the shade does not change upon reading the verses in the Quran in which Allah points to these two. One’s knowledge does not change but, he argues, the individual changes. Qutb states,

Did your information about the shadows or bees change when you read these verses? Certainly not! The information in itself was not new. It was known beforehand. However, that was a knowledge that was a dead, cold, still and unmoving information. But the Quran brings this information and presents it in an emotional or moving setting, in a miraculous fashion, that changes one’s perspective as if it were not what we knew beforehand. The information did not change but we are the ones who changed…[70]

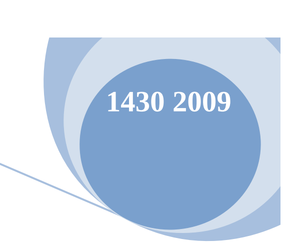
For the new Muslim, this may be a completely new way of looking at the world and may take some adjustment. Many non-Muslims do not see God’s involvement in this world and therefore they do not feel any direct relationship with God. As the new Muslim ponders over the Quran, this feeling may develop within him. He will see Allah’s working in everything around him. This will remind him of Allah and he will no longer be negligent of Allah and his duty toward Him. He will be then, God willing, leading his life in a manner very different from before his conversion to Islam.

(7) Ordering Good and Eradicating Evil.

Islam is not a religion in which one purifies one’s own soul while ignoring or not helping others as well along the path of purification. As discussed later in this work, Islam stresses the proper relationship between different individuals of society. One of the most important interactions between individuals is

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[69] Muhammad Qutb, pp. 42-43.
[70] Muhammad Qutb, p. 45.

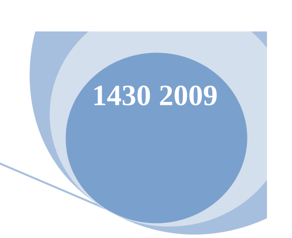


that of ordering or encouraging what is good while prohibiting or preventing that which is evil. It is part of true brotherhood that one wants to assist others to do what is right. It is also definitely part of true brotherhood that when one sees another Muslim doing something displeasing to Allah, that he would want to correct and advise his brother or sister in Islam. Thus, in the Quran, Allah relates the concept of being true brethren, friends and helpers to one another directly to the concept of ordering good and preventing evil. Allah says, "The believers, men and women, are helpers and supporters of one another, they enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil" (9:71). Allah also says, "Help one another in righteous dealings and in acts of piety. But do not help one another in sins or acts of aggression against others" (5:2). In fact, Allah makes it clear that encouraging good and preventing evil should be one of the overriding qualities of the Muslim Nation as a whole: "You are the best of peoples ever raised up for mankind; you enjoin what is good, forbid what is evil, and you believe in Allah" (3:110).

This is not an "optional way" to behave. It is a necessary part of one's faith and attitude. This is part and parcel of what it means to belong to a community. An individual has rights upon others as well as obligations towards others. Looking out for one another and assisting one another is essential, especially for those in positions of authority or whose voices are listened to. Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has informed the Muslims, "By the One in whose hand is my soul, you must order good and forbid evil or Allah will soon send upon you a punishment from Himself and then you will supplicate to Him and He will not respond to you."[71]

In a beautiful parable recorded by al-Bukhari, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) demonstrated the importance of this practice for society as a whole: "The similitude of the one who fulfills Allah's command [by eradicating evil] and the one who falls into what Allah forbids is like a people who drew lots for places on a boat. Some of them got the upper level of the boat while others were on the lower level. Whenever the people on the lower level wanted water, they had to go to the people on the upper level. Therefore, they said, 'If we were to make a hole in our portion we would not have to bother the people above us [to get water].' If they [the people on the

[71] Recorded by Ahmad and al-Tirmidhi. According to al-Albaani, it is *hasan*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 2, p. 1189.



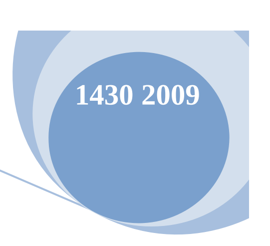
upper level] leave them to what they want to do, all of them would be destroyed. If, instead, they take them by their hands [and stop them from what they plan on doing], they will be saved and they will save all of them."

Many times people would like to stay away from evil but they need help in doing so. They need true friends around them who can act like a support group. Some individuals simply do not have the strength to remain away from activities that they know are wrong or that they themselves do not like, especially if there is peer pressure on them. With the help of others who understand what he is going through and who recognize that he truly wants to do what is right, he is able to muster up the courage to say no to wrong activities. Similarly, others are simply lazy or lack the motivation to do the actions they should perform. Again, with the sincere help or encouragement from those around him, the individual finds the strength to do what is right.

If people were individualistic and only concerned about their own selves, not lending hands to others, it would be disastrous for society. Those who do evil would dominate and harass others. In fact, many neighborhoods in the U.S., for example, have recognized this fact. The neighbors realized that they had to get together to encourage good things and remove evil things, as otherwise their neighborhoods were being destroyed by hoodlums. In the same way, true believers come together and assist one another promoting all good things and blocking all evil things.

Obviously, no one is going to be free from sin and therefore this principle of encouraging good and preventing evil does not mean that one has to be perfect before he can speak to others about their behavior. However, the encouraging of good and preventing of evil, logically, should begin with one's own self. One should make oneself do what is good and prevent oneself from doing evil. In this way, one sets an example for others and such a person will more likely be listened to when he advises others. At the same time, though, even if a person has some shortcomings, he should still encourage others to do good and try to keep them from evil.

It must be noted that there are some conditions for the practice of encouraging good and preventing evil. One condition, for example, is that one has knowledge of what is good and what is evil according to Quran and Sun-



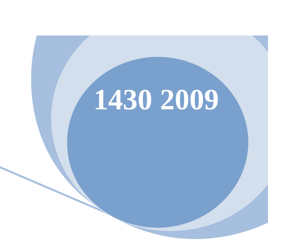
nah. It is possible that someone, due to ignorance, may encourage another not to do an act while that act is actually from the Sunnah.

For the new Muslim, in particular, he may find himself repeatedly on the end of being told what to do or what not to do. Many times this advice comes from other Muslims who may seem overzealous or who do not have the proper tack when speaking to a new Muslim. Many times language difficulties magnify the manner in which the new Muslim is being spoken to. It is important for the new Muslim to realize that, in general, his fellow Muslim means him no harm or humiliation. Instead, he may be simply acting on the basis of trying to encourage him to do what is right and teaching others about Islam. If the new Muslim sometimes feels frustrated about such occurrences, he should remind himself that the others are acting out of love and want only what is good for their new brother in Islam.

(8) The Proper Honoring of Humankind

There is no question that in God's scheme for this creation, humans have been given many special talents and skills, making them distinct from other creatures. Thus, Allah says in the Quran, "And indeed We have honored the Children of Adam, and We have carried them on land and sea, and have provided them with lawful good things, and have preferred them above many of those whom We have created with a marked preference" (17:70). This marked preference is not the result of a random form of "evolution" but is the intentional determination of the Creator.

Through divine guidance one can fully understand the many ways by which humans have been honored by their Lord. Through Allah's revelation, one discovers that humans are not in a battle against "nature" which needs to be conquered. One also learns that humans are not simply the "cousins of apes" with no particular purpose or goal in this life. One also learns that this creation is not "inherently evil" or that one is born with "an original sin" that cannot be removed save through the sacrifice of another being. Starting from vantage points such as those, it is not surprising to see the worth of humans being reduced to virtually nothing.



It is not surprising to see humans being used as simply tools for economic advantage and profit. Indeed, it is not even surprising to see thousands of humans killed simply for the sake of economic advantages and natural resources. After all, coming from such a perspective, why should humans be treated any differently from other animals that are similarly exploited, killed and destroyed? Truly, it is via Allah's revelation that one becomes to fully appreciate what a human is and how humans should be treated and respected.

In reality, Allah allowed humans to bear the great responsibility of being His servants, by which they can attain the greatest of all rewards. Allah honored humans by revealing books specifically for their guidance. Allah chose messengers and prophets from among humans, giving them the noblest task of conveying Allah's guidance for humankind. Allah has even subjugated everything in the heavens and the earth to the needs of humans: "He has subjected to you all that is in the heavens and all that is in the earth; it is all as a favor and kindness from Him. Verily, in it are signs for a people who think deeply" (45:13).

In addition, He has given the opportunity to humans to become His devoted servants, martyrs for His cause and scholars of His religion, giving them special nobility and honor. These great achievements are equally open to the males and females of this species. Thus, Allah says, for example, "Never will I allow to be lost the work of any of you, be he male or female. You are (members) one of another, so those who emigrated and were driven out from their homes, and suffered harm in My Cause, and who fought, and were killed (in My Cause), verily, I will remit from them their evil deeds and admit them into Gardens under which rivers flow (in Paradise); a reward from Allah, and with Allah is the best of rewards" (3:195). Allah also says, "Whoever works righteousness, whether male or female, while he (or she) is a true believer verily, to him We will give a good life (in this world with respect, contentment and lawful provision), and We shall pay them certainly a reward in proportion to the best of what they used to do" (16:97).

In fact, the only real difference between people has nothing to do with their gender, their ethnicity, their race, their wealth, their sex appeal or their class. All of those are false ways of considering humans. Such standards, in fact, do nothing but denigrate humans. The only real standard for the worth of



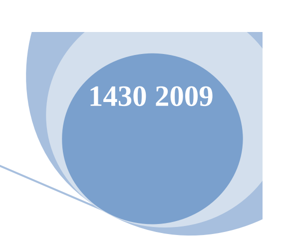
a human is his relationship with his Lord. Thus, Allah says, "O humankind! We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know one another. Verily, the most honorable of you with Allah is that (believer) who has piety. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware" (49:13).

One hears a lot of talk about human rights nowadays. This seems to be an attempt to treat humans in the most dignified and respectable manner. However, the biggest problem with human rights is that God is not given His proper role with respect to humans. Instead, humans virtually become the ultimate object of worship—and the "rights" of humans are given dominance over anything else, even the rights of God. In fact, much talk about human rights is not much more than freeing humans from the worship of Allah.[72]

This is not a proper way of honoring humans. Indeed, this is a type of extremism. Whenever anything is magnified out of proportion and giving rights or responsibilities above what it can bear, the result will be harm and suffering. Humans cannot be put into a role where they are given the choice to decide everything for themselves, including what rights they must have upon one another. These kinds of issues can only be decided by their Creator who knows the innermost details of their creation and the interactions with the rest of creation.

In the law of Allah, by the mercy of Allah, Allah has given humans all of the rights that they need and deserve, as only He could possibly determine for them based on His knowledge and justice. They receive from God the rights that they need to live a prosperous and happy life. At the same time, though, they are also given responsibilities. Both rights and responsibilities have to go hand and hand for humans to interact with each other properly in this creation.

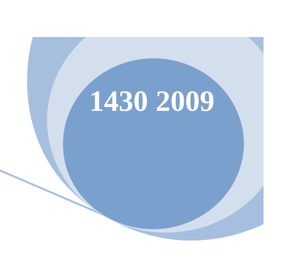
[72] In fact, if a society decides it wishes to worship Allah completely, both as individuals and as a society, and thereby forbids certain practices, such as homosexuality, that society would definitely be accused of violating human rights today. In fact, if an individual submits to God and thereby avoids homosexuals in his life, he would be accused of not honoring human rights. In other words, as part of human rights, a human has virtually every right except the right to truly worship and submit oneself to God.



The greatest drawback, though, of the human rights proponents is that they can only touch upon rights related to this world. In this way, they are forgetting the most important right because it is beyond the realm of human experience. This is the right that Islam brings them—their special right upon Allah. This right is described in the following hadith:

The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "O Muaadh!" Muaadh replied, "At your beck and call, O Messenger of Allah." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) then asked him, "Do you know what Allah's right is over His servants?" Muaadh replied, "Allah and His Messenger know best." The Prophet then told him, "Allah's right upon His servants is that they worship Him [alone] and do not ascribe any partners to Him." Then after a while, the Prophet said, "O Muaadh ibn Jabal!" He replied, "At your beck and call, O Messenger of Allah." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) then asked him, "Do you know what the right of the servants upon Allah is if they do that?" He replied, "Allah and His Messenger know best." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) then told him, "The right of the servants upon Allah is that He will not punish them."[73]

[73] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.



Becoming a Muslim

By Allah's grace, He has made His religion open to anyone who wishes to enter it. There are virtually no obstacles to becoming a Muslim. In order to embrace Islam, there is no need for clergy, baptisms or special ceremonies. In fact, the act that makes one a Muslim is a simple declaration of one's faith. Thus, one only need state, "I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." Upon stating these sentences, one enters into the beautiful brotherhood/sisterhood of Islam, a brotherhood/sisterhood that stretches from the time of Adam until the last days of this earth.

In this chapter, there shall be a discussion of some of the details concerning the testimony of faith. In addition, there shall be a discussion of other actions that are mentioned in connection with the act of becoming a Muslim. This shall be followed by some laws related to one's state before becoming a Muslim.

The Testimony of Faith: There is None Worthy of Worship except Allah

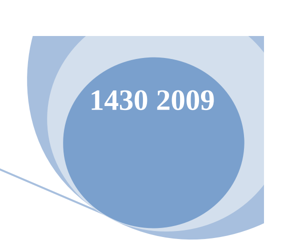
A person becomes a Muslim by testifying to the truth of the statements: There is none worthy of worship except Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Since this is a testimony or bearing witness to the truth of something, it must be a "public proclamation" (or, in other words, not something hidden within oneself but, instead, conveyed to others[74]). Ibn Abu al-Izz wrote,

> [The Prophet (peace be upon him)] has made it absolutely clear that a person is definitely not a believer if it is claimed that he believes in the Prophet (peace be on him) but he does not profess it with his tongue, even though he can...[75]

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[74] A possible exception to this would be when one fears immediate death upon displaying one's Islam. Otherwise, one is expected to openly profess Islam even if he may face some opposition or hardship along the way. Such was the example of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his Companions.

[75] Ibn Abu al-Izz, vol. 2, pp. 471. The translation used here is a pre-publication copy of Muhammad Abdul Haq Ansari, trans., *Commentary on the Creed of at-Tahawi by ibn Abi al-Izz* (Riyadh: Ministry



This profession of the tongue plays a three-fold role. It is first a statement of a fact. One is testifying that he recognizes the truthfulness of that statement of faith. This would be analogous to a person giving testimony in a court of law. All he is really stating is that those are the facts that he believes to be true.

Second, though, it is statement of commitment to that fact. It is an admission by the person that he intends to adhere to the requirements and guidance of what he has testified to.

Third, it is a public proclamation that the individual has now joined the fold of Muslims, accepting all of the rights and responsibilities that such implies.

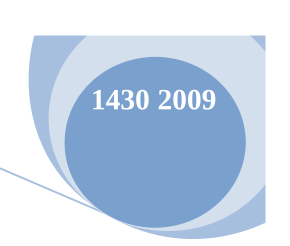
Muslims know that the key to Paradise is the statement, "There is none worthy of worship except Allah." Yet many Muslims simply rely upon this statement and believe that as long as they have said it, nothing will harm them. Because of this mere verbal statement of the testimony of faith, they think they will be granted Paradise However, the mere saying of the statement is not sufficient for salvation. In fact, the hypocrites used to say, "I testify that none is worthy of worship except Allah and…," yet Allah describes them as liars and says that they shall abide in the lowest abyss of the Hell-fire. Obviously, there are some conditions for any testimony but in particular for this testimony to be accepted by Allah there are some particular conditions[76]—and everyone should be extremely concerned over whether his testimony of faith is acceptable to Allah or not.

The famous Follower Wahb ibn Munabbih was once asked, "Isn't the statement of, 'There is none worthy of worship except Allah,' the key to Para-

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of Higher Education, 2000). For the sake of the page numbering, the published version from Mu'assasat al-Risaalah will be the work referred to.

[76] The conditions of the testimony of faith are well-known and discussed in numerous works. See, for example, Haafidh ibn Ahmad Hakimi, *Ma'arij al-Qubool bi-Sharh Sullim al-Wusool ila Ilm al-Usool fi al-Tauheed* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 307-315; Abdullah ibn Jibreen, *al-Shahadataan* (no city or publisher given, 1990), pp. 77-86; this author also presented most of this material on the two parts of the *shahaadah* in his *The Friday Prayer: Part II: Khutbahs (I)* (Aurora, CO: IANA, 1994), pp. 4-19; *The Friday Prayer: Part III: Khutbahs (II)* (Ann Arbor, MI: IANA, 1995), pp. 35-42.



dise?" He answered, "Yes, but every key has ridges. If you come with the key that has the right ridges, the door will open for you. Yet if you do not have the right ridges, the door will not open for you." These ridges are conditions that differentiate Muslims who will benefit from that statement from those who will not benefit from that statement, no matter how many times a day they may have made that statement.

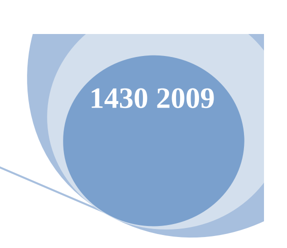
A study of the verses of the Quran and the hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) will show that there are a number of conditions for the soundness of one's testimony of faith. Again, it is important that every Muslim verify that he is meeting these conditions in his own life with respect to his own testimony of faith. The new convert should consider these conditions concerning his testimony of faith. Preferably (but not necessarily), these would have been explained to him before he undertook the declaration of faith.

The first condition is knowledge. One must have the necessary basic understanding of what is meant by the declaration of faith. One must understand what he is affirming and what he is denying in the declaration. This is true for any kind of testimony. When one testifies to something, one must know what it is that he is testifying concerning. Obviously, a testimony about something that one does not have any knowledge of is unacceptable. Allah says in the Quran, "Save him who bears witness unto the truth knowingly" (43:86).

Therefore, the basics of the testimony must be understood by the person testifying to it. If he does not understand, for example, that Allah is the only one worthy of worship and that all other gods are false gods, then he does not even have the most elementary understanding of what it is he claims to be testifying to. Such a testimony cannot be considered a proper one that is acceptable to Allah.

The second condition is certainty. This is the opposite of doubt and uncertainty. In Islam, in fact, any kind of doubt concerning anything confirmed in the Quran or the Sunnah is equivalent to disbelief.[77] One must, in his heart, be

[77] An exception to this is related to the case of ignorance where one is doubtful about something and is not aware that it is proven in the Quran and Sunnah. Once the person then knows that something is definitively confirmed in the Quran or Sunnah, there is no excuse for him to have any doubt about it.



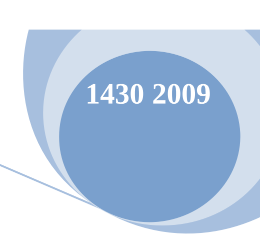
absolutely certain of the truth of the testimony of faith. One's heart must not be wavering in any way when one testifies to the truth of, "There is none worthy of worship except Allah." Allah describes the true believers as those who have belief in Allah and then their hearts waver not. Allah says, "The (true) believers are only those who believe in Allah and His messenger and afterward doubt not, but strive with their wealth and their lives for the cause of Allah. Such are the sincere" (49:15).

Similarly, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "No one meets Allah with the testimony that there is none worthy of worship but Allah and I am the Messenger of Allah, and he has no doubt about that statement, except that he will enter Paradise."[78] On the other hand, Allah describes the hypocrites as those people whose hearts are wavering. For example, Allah says, "They alone seek leave of you [not to participate in Jihad] who believe not in Allah and the Last Day and whose hearts feel doubt, so in their doubt they waver" (9: 45).

The third condition of the testimony of faith is acceptance. If a person has the conditions of knowledge and certainty, this must be followed by acceptance, with the tongue and heart, of whatever that testimony implies. Whoever refuses to accept the testimony of faith with all of its implications, even if he knows that it is true and is certain about its truth, is a disbeliever. This refusal to accept is sometimes due to pride, envy or other reasons. In any case, the testimony is not an acceptable testimony without its unconditional acceptance.

This condition also means that the Muslim believes in whatever is stated in the Quran or stated by the Prophet (peace be upon him), without any right to choose what he wants to believe and what he wants to reject. Allah says in the Quran, "Do you believe in part of the Book and reject part of it? And what is the reward of those who do so save ignominy in the life of the world, and on the Day of Resurrection they will be consigned to the most grievous doom" (2:85). Allah has also said, "It is not for a believing man or believing woman, when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter, to have any option in

[78] Recorded by Muslim.



their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger has indeed strayed in plain error" (33:36).

The fourth condition is submission and compliance. This implies the actual physical enactment by deeds. This is one of the main meanings of the word Islam itself, "the submission to the will and commands of Allah." Allah commands this in the Quran, "And turn in repentance and in obedience with true Faith to your Lord and submit to Him" (39: 54).

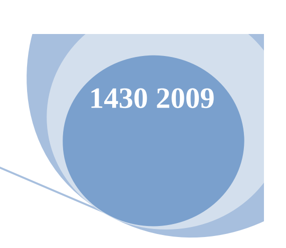
Allah has made it a condition of faith that one submits to the command of Allah and His messenger. Allah says, "But nay, by your Lord, they will not truly believe until they make you [the Messenger of Allah] judge of what is in dispute between them and find within themselves no dislike of that which you decide, and submit with full submission" (4:65).

This does not mean that the true believer never falls into sin. Indeed, true believers do commit sins. But as long as they recognize that what they did is not correct and it is inconsistent with their obligation of submitting to Allah, then they have not violated the soundness of their testimony.

The fifth condition is truthfulness as opposed to hypocrisy and dishonesty. This means that when one says the testimony of faith, he is saying it honestly, actually meaning it. He is not lying when it comes to his testimony of faith or simply trying to deceive or fool anyone. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "No one bears testimony to there being no one worthy of worship save Allah, sincerely from his heart, except that Allah makes the Hell-fire forbidden for him."[79]

The sixth condition is purity or making this testimony of faith solely for the sake of Allah. One must not do it for any other reason or anyone else's sake. In this manner, the meaning of purity is the opposite of ascribing partners with Allah. One becomes and remains Muslim solely to serve Allah, to avoid His anger and punishment and to gain His mercy and reward. Allah says in the Quran, "Worship Allah, making religion pure for him" (39:2). The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said, "Allah has forbidden for the Hell-fire anyone

[79] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



who says, 'There is no one worthy of worship except Allah,' and says so desiring the face [and pleasure] of Allah."[80]

The seventh condition is love. That is, the believer loves the testimony of faith, he loves in accordance with the testimony, he loves its implications and requirements and he loves those who act and strive on its basis. This is a necessary condition of the testimony of faith. If a person makes the testimony but does not love it and what it stands for, then, in fact, his faith is not complete. It is not the faith of a true believer. If he has no love for this testimony or if he actually feels hatred for it, he has negated his testimony.

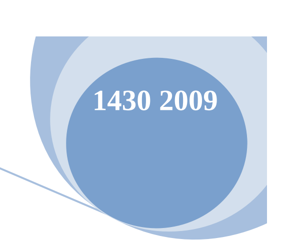
The true believer puts no one as an equal to Allah in his love. Allah says in the Quran, "Yet of mankind are some who take unto themselves (objects of worship which they set as) rivals to Allah, loving them with a love like (that which is due to) Allah only. However, those who believe are stauncher in their love of Allah" (2:165). Elsewhere Allah says, "Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brethren, your wives, your tribe, the wealth you have acquired, merchandise for which you fear that there will be no sale, or dwellings you desire are dearer to you than Allah and His messenger and striving in His way: then wait till Allah brings His command to pass. Allah guides not wrongdoing folk" (9:24).

An eighth condition is that the person who states the testimony must deny every other object of worship. Although that is clear in the words of the testimony of faith, it does not seem clear to everyone who makes that testimony. Therefore, it needs to be mentioned explicitly.

In *soorah al-Baqara*, Allah reminds Muslims of this important aspect of the testimony. The testimony of faith is not merely an affirmation but it is both an affirmation and a negation. Allah states, "And he who rejects false deities and believes in Allah has grasped a firm handhold which will never break" (2: 256).

The ninth condition is that the Muslim adheres to the testimony of faith until he dies. This is a must if the testimony is to mean anything in the Hereaf-

[80] Recorded by Muslim.



ter. One cannot rest on his laurels of what he may have done in the past. No, indeed, the declaration of faith must be his banner until death. Allah says in the Quran, "O believers, observe your duty to Allah with right observance, and die not save as Muslims [surrendering yourselves to Allah]" (3:102).

Finally, the testimony does not have to be in the Arabic language or with specific terms but it must be very clear as to the exact meaning and purport of what the person is saying.[81]

The Testimony of Faith: Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah

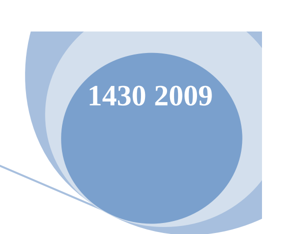
It is important to understand the meaning and the implications of the second part of the testimony of faith as well. Indeed, sometimes one strays from the Straight Path and from Islam itself because he is not implementing the second part of the declaration of faith properly.

When one testifies that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, he is stating his belief that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) was chosen by Allah to be His Messenger and to convey His Message. Allah specifically chose the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to be His Messenger. Allah says, "Allah knows best with whom to place His Message" (6:124).

This implies some characteristics of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as obviously Allah, due to His justice, wisdom and mercy, would not choose one who is treacherous or lying to be His Messenger. Allah would not choose anyone for such an important mission whom He knew would not convey the message or who would use the position to his own advantage. If anyone claims that the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not actually convey the entire message or that he distorted it in any way, he is actually saying that Allah did not know who was the correct or best person to be a messenger. This is obvious disbelief.

Second, when one makes the testimony of faith, he is also testifying that the Prophet (peace be upon him) has been sent for all of mankind until the

[81] In a hadith, some people embraced Islam by saying, *Saba`na*, meaning they had entered the faith of those who were called *Sabi`ah*, which was a term of the people of Ignorance for the Muslims.



Day of Judgment. Allah says in the Quran, "Say [O Muhammad]: O mankind! Verily, I am sent to you all as the Messenger of Allah" (7:158). It is obligatory upon everyone from the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) until the Day of Judgment to believe in and follow the Prophet (peace be upon him). This also implies that the Prophet's teachings and his Sunnah are valid and obligatory upon all of mankind until the Day of Judgment.

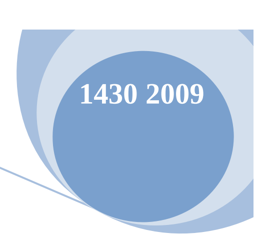
Some people seem to try to resist the idea that they have to follow the Prophet (peace be upon him). When they do so, they must realize that they are going against what they have testified to. They have testified that the Prophet's message, which includes both the Quran and his inspired Sunnah, is for all of mankind— including each and everyone alive today.

Third, when one makes the declaration of faith, he is testifying that he believes with certainty that the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) conveyed the message— he conveyed it correctly, he conveyed all of it, and he conveyed it clearly. Allah says in the Quran, "The Messenger's duty is only to convey (the message) in a clear way" (29: 18). The Prophet (peace be upon him) himself said, "I left you on a bright path whose night and day are alike. No one strays from it after me except he is destroyed."[82]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) conveyed all of the guidance and revelation that he received from Allah. He conveyed and explained it in a clear manner. Therefore, one is also testifying that the Prophet (peace be upon him) conveyed all the aspects of the religion– its fundamental as well as its secondary aspects. There is no part of the religion that one needs for his guidance that was not conveyed to mankind or that Allah or the Prophet (peace be upon him) may have possibly forgotten.

Therefore, when this complete and clear guidance from the Prophet (peace be upon him) is present, there is no need for any Muslim to turn to other sources for guidance. There is no need for one to turn to the books of the Jews or Christians. Indeed, the Prophet (peace be upon him) told Umar, when he saw him reading the Torah, that if the Prophet Moses were alive at his time, he would also have to follow the Prophet Muhammad (peace be

[82] Recorded by Ahmad and al-Baihaqi. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. See Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami al-Sagheer* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1986), vol. 2, p. 805.



upon him). There is no need for any Muslim to turn to the Greek philosophers, for example, to learn about theology.

In fact, there is no need for Muslims to turn the religious or spiritual teachings of any non-Muslims to get guidance. All that is needed is to be found in the Quran and Sunnah. This is part of what the Muslim is testifying to. The Muslim bears witness that the Prophet (peace be upon him) conveyed the entire message.

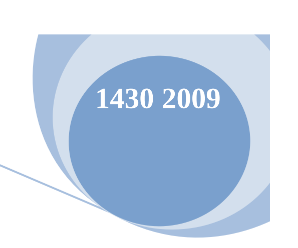
When one declares, "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah," one is also declaring that he is the final prophet sent by Allah. Allah says in the Quran, "Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger of Allah and the Last of the Prophets" (33: 40).

There is to be no prophet who is going to come after the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). No new prophet and no new scripture will come that will abrogate what the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) brought. Furthermore, if anyone after the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) claims to be a prophet, it is known automatically that such a person is a liar and a deceiver.[83] He must be opposed and it should be declared to all that his claim to prophethood is false. To accept anyone as a prophet after the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) is to falsify one's declaration of the testimony of faith.

It must also be realized that when one makes the testimony of faith, this not only implies that he believes in certain things but it also implies that he accepts certain responsibilities that stem from it. For example, when he says that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, for that testimony to be true, it means that he is now taking on the responsibility of worshipping no one other than Allah.

Similarly, when one says, "I testify that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah," he is taking on certain responsibilities with respect to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). When he is lacking in any of these responsibili-

[83] It is true that the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) will return. However, when he returns, he will not do so in the role of a prophet or messenger. He will be only a follower of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his Law.



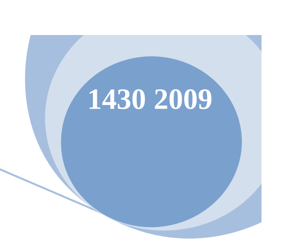
ties, then he is lacking in his complete fulfillment of his testimony of faith. It can even get to the point that he negates his testimony completely by refusing to fulfill his responsibility to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

One of these obligations toward the Prophet (peace be upon him) is to love him. This does not just imply any form of love but complete faith requires that one loves the Prophet (peace be upon him) more than anyone or anything else of this world. Allah says in the Quran, "Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your kindred, the wealth that you have gained, the commerce in which you fear a decline, and the dwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger, and striving hard and fighting in His cause, then wait until Allah brings about His Decision (torment). And Allah guides not the people who are disobedient" (9:24).

Second, when one makes the testimony of faith, this means that he is accepting the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as his example of how to live and behave in a way that is correct and pleasing to Allah. Allah says in the Quran, "Indeed in the Messenger of Allah you have an excellent example to follow for him who hopes in (a good meeting with) Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much" (33:21). Allah also says, "Say (O Muhammad): If you love Allah, then follow me and Allah will love you and forgive you your sins" (3:31)

It is very strange that some people actually state the testimony of faith and declare that Muhammad is the Messenger and Prophet of Allah yet at the same time they do not consider him an example of the way of life that a believer should follow. Not only do they not take him as an example for themselves, they actually oppose others who do take the Prophet (peace be upon him) as their example. This is nothing but a clear sign that such a person does not have a clear understanding of the meaning and implications of the testimony of faith that he made.

The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said, "I swear by Allah that I am the most fearful of Allah and most conscious of Him than all of you. But I also [as part of my Sunnah] fast and break my fast, pray and sleep [at night] and I marry women. Whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not from me [that is, is



not one of my true followers].”[84] In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) explained that he is the most fearful of Allah and God-conscious. Therefore, there is no excuse for anyone not to follow his example and guidance. But he also stated that the one who turns away from his practice and example is not from him. One cannot truthfully claim to believe in and accept the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) and, at the same time, refuse to accept his life as the example that one must strive to emulate.

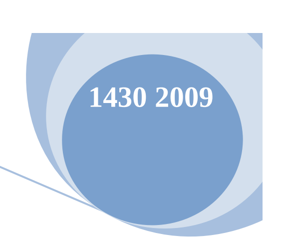
Other Deeds Related to the Act of Embracing Islam

There are a few other deeds that are often associated with the act of declaring one’s faith. These are (1) a complete bathing, (2) removing all of one’s hairs from pre-Islamic days and (3) circumcision. Each of these shall be discussed separately below. Before moving on, it must be noted that none of these actions, however, should lead to a delay in a person’s embracing Islam. In fact, once a person has decided to embrace Islam, the event should not be postponed, for example, to a more appropriate time or a time in which more people will be witnessing and so forth. In reality, no one knows when a person may be taken by death and, therefore, whenever a person has made a conclusive decision to embrace Islam, he should embrace it at that time by making the declaration of faith.

(1) A Complete Bathing: There are actually four opinions among the scholars concerning the complete bathing in connection with embracing Islam. Without going into great detail[85], the views may be summarized as follows: One view is that the bathing is obligatory upon anyone who embraces Islam. This is one opinion found in the Maliki school and is the well-known opinion of the Hanbali school. Another view is that this bathing is not obligatory under any circumstances. This is also a view held by some of the Hanbali school. A third view is that this bathing is recommended for anyone who embraces Islam. This is one of the views of the Hanafi, Maliki and Hanbali schools. A final view holds that this bathing is only recommended, unless an individual is in a state of sexual defilement or a woman has previously experienced menstrua-

[84] Recorded by al-Bukhari.

[85] For more details on this issue, see Dubyaan al-Dubyaan, *Ahkaam al-Tahaarah: al-Ghusl* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Rushd, 2004), pp. 113-128. Yahya al-Nawawi, *Al-Majmoo Sharh al-Muhadhib*, (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, 1997), vol. 2, p. 153-154; Ibn Qudaamah, *al-Mughni*, vol. 1, pp. 350f.



tion or post-partum bleeding—in which case it becomes obligatory. In those cases, the bathing is required for the state of ritual purity required for the prayer.

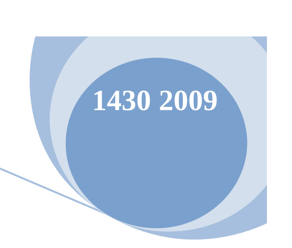
Part of the reason for the difference of opinion on this issue is the existence of some reports in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told some individuals who had embraced Islam to perform a complete bathing. However, as stated earlier, in order for such reports (or hadith) to be considered a proof in Islamic Law, they must meet very stringent conditions. These reports all have some minor defects to them and are considered weak by a number of hadith scholars.[86]

In addition, some scholars note that numerous people embraced Islam during the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and there is no record of there being a general order or understanding that such people were to bathe as part of the process of becoming Muslim. Furthermore, given this argument, the reports of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) telling some individuals to bathe may be a sign that such bathing is recommended but not obligatory.

At the same time, though, the new Muslim is going to be required to perform the prayers.[87] It is a requirement for the prayer that an individual be in a state of physical purity and the act of bathing itself requires the intention of entering into a state of purity, as opposed to being simply for the sake of washing. Although some scholars argue that the individual's previous state is overlooked by Islam, this does not seem to be a strong argument at this point. If the individual is sexually defiled or if a woman has experienced menstruation or post-partum bleeding, they will have to make a complete bathing before performing the prayer.

In sum, based on the overall evidence, it can be argued that bathing after making one's declaration of the faith is, at most, a recommended act but

[86] However, the very well-respected al-Albaani is one scholar of hadith who considers such reports authentic. See Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, footnotes to *Mishkaat al-Masaabeeh,* vol. 1, p. 118.
[87] If a woman is menstruating or experiencing post-partum bleeding at the time of embracing Islam, she will not be required to pray until that condition ceases.



not an obligatory act. This should not be looked at as a mere ritual without any significance. The person who embraces Islam definitely has had a spiritual rebirth and is setting about on a transformation of his life. In fact, for most converts, Islam is truly a life transformation very different from his previous pattern of life. Hence, he should prepare himself mentally, emotionally and physically. This bathing metaphorically removes from him all of the different types of physical impurities that may still be lingering on him. He is now ready to venture on his new path.

In any case, though—at least to be on the safe side—before one prays, one has to be in a state of physical purity which would require a complete bathing on the part of those who were sexually defiled or women who had experienced menstruation or post-partum bleeding in the past.

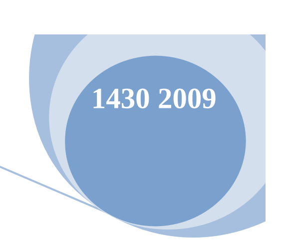
(2) Removing all of one's hairs from pre-Islamic days: This action is also based on a hadith which the vast majority of the scholars reject as weak. This is a hadith in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is reported to have said to a man who had just informed him that he had embraced Islam, "Remove from yourself [or shave off of yourself] the hairs from [the time of] disbelief."[88]

Again, even if the hadith is accepted as authentic, this was not a practice that was known to be widespread during the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) or afterwards. Thus, some scholars understand this hadith as applying only to those people who grew their hair for a religious purpose. In that case, they should remove that hair upon becoming a Muslim.[89]

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[88] Recorded by Ahmad, Abdul-Razzaaq, Abu Dawood, al-Tabaraani, al-Haakim, al-Baihaqi and others. The following scholars have declared this a weak hadith: al-Nawawi, ibn Hajar, al-Dhahabi, al-Munaawi, al-Mundhiri, al-Shaukaani, al-Adheemabaadi, al-Mubaarakfoori, and al-Dubyaan. Al-Albaani, though, once again concludes that the narration is authentic. See Muhammad Naasir al-Deen al-Albaani, *Silsilat al-Ahaadeeth al-Saheehah* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ma'aarif), vol. 6, p. 476.

[89] Such explanations have been given by al-Adheemabaadi and al-Mubaarakfoori. Cf., Muhammad Shams al-Haqq al-Adheemabaadi, *Aun al-Ma'bood Sharh Sunan Abi Dawood* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1995), vol. 2, p. 15; Muhammad al-Mubaarakfoori, *Tuhfah al-Ahwadhi* (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 183.



For example, in contemporary times, it is well-known that Sikhs do not remove any hairs from their head or body as a sign of their brotherhood. However, there is nothing explicit in the text that would support his interpretation. Hence, once again, either the hadith is weak or if it is accepted, it may be understood to be a recommended but not a required act. As with the case of the bathing, it is an act by which one removes the remnants of his pre-Islamic life in order to set about on his new life as a Muslim and servant of God.

(3) Circumcision: In some of the narrations that mention the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) telling the new Muslim to remove his hairs of pre-Islamic days, the individual is also told to be circumcised.[90] There is also another narration that states, "Whoever embraces Islam is to be circumcised, even if he is of older age." But this is also a report that cannot be verified as a statement of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

There is no question that circumcision is an established practice of Islam. It is obligatory or an emphasized recommended act.[91] However, the evidence is lacking to prove that one must immediately fulfill this act upon becoming a Muslim. There are some exceptions that excuse a person from performing this act.

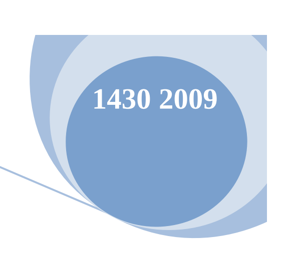
In the past, scholars mentioned an adult who embraces Islam and fears negative consequences via the process of circumcision.[92] Of course, in contemporary times, this possibility has been reduced, as circumcision is now a precise and safe medical procedure. At the same time, though, it is costly in some parts of the world, especially if it is considered an elective procedure. This financial burden could be more than what some converts could afford to bear, in which case they can delay the procedure until they are able to afford it. And Allah alone knows best.

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[90] Recorded by Ahmad, Abdul-Razzaaq, Abu Dawood, al-Baihaqi and al-Tabaraani. Again, this is a weak hadith according to the majority of the scholars, although al-Albaani has accepted it.

[91] For a lengthy discussion of this issue, see Dubyaan al-Dubyaan, *Ahkaam al-Tahaaraah: Sunan al-Fitra* (2000), pp. 91-110.

[92] Cf., Al-Dubyaan, *Ahkaam al-Tahaaraah: Sunan al-Fitra*, p. 137.



The Special Rewards and Circumstances for the Convert

There are some statements of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that demonstrate that there are some special rewards and circumstances for the Muslim convert.

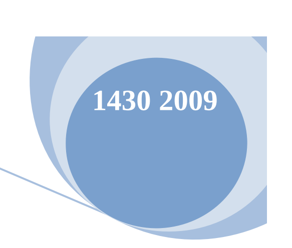
In general, an individual will enter Islam while his past will be filled with both good and evil deeds. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has explained what will happen to the individual with respect to those previous deeds.

Al-Bukhari records in his collection of authentic hadith: Hakeem ibn Hizaam said, "O Messenger of Allah, what do you think about the acts of worship I used to perform in the pre-Islamic days of freeing slaves, keeping the ties of kinship and giving in charity? Will I receive any reward for that?" The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told him, "You have embraced Islam upon what good you had in the past."[93]

One interpretation of this hadith is that the individual will be rewarded for the good that he did in the past and this reward is due to his embracing of Islam. It must be noted, though, that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not explicitly tell him that he will be rewarded for those actions that he did before becoming a Muslim. In order for a deed to be acceptable to Allah, it must be done with the proper intention of pleasing Allah and with the certainty that it is correct according to Allah's laws. These two conditions, obviously, are generally missing when discussing the deeds of disbelievers. Hence, others interpret this hadith in different ways.

One explanation is that those good deeds have developed a good character in the person and demonstrates a leaning toward doing good that he will greatly benefit from by now being a Muslim. This tendency toward doing good may have been what led him to Islam. In fact, it may have been because of those deeds that Allah blessed him by guiding him to Islam. The hadith may also mean that the person will still be rewarded for those deeds but in this world. This is part of the great mercy and justice of Islam that He does not

[93] The comments to be presented concerning this hadith are based on Ahmad ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Baari bi-Sharh Saheeh al-Bukhaari* (Beirut: Daar al-Maridah), vol. 3, pp. 302-303; Badr al-Deen Al-Aini, *Umdah al-Qaari* (Beirut: Daar Ihyaa al-Turaath), vol. 8, p. 303.



allow any good deed to go unrewarded. Although such good deeds done by non-Muslims may not meet the conditions of being rewarded by Allah in the Hereafter, Allah does not ignore them and gives to such unbelievers in this life. Hence, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "The disbeliever is rewarded in this life by provisions for what he has done of good deeds."[94]

However, there is yet another statement of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that clearly states that if a person converts to Islam and does his best to complete and perfect his faith, he will indeed be rewarded for the deeds that he performed before becoming a Muslim. This seems to be a special bounty that Allah has chosen to bestow upon such people and Allah bestows His bounty upon whom He wills. The text of this hadith reads: "If a servant accepts Islam and completes his Islam, Allah will record for him every good deed that he performed before [his Islam] and Allah will erase for him every evil deed that he did before [his Islam]. Then everything after that will be according to a retribution. For every good deed, he will be recorded ten-fold up to seven hundred fold. And for every evil deed he will be recorded similarly [one] for it, unless Allah overlooks that for him."[95]

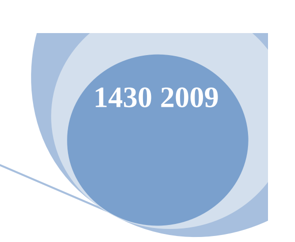
This hadith shows that a person will be rewarded for the good deeds that he performed before becoming Muslim. His evil deeds will also be erased after becoming Muslim. However, this is conditional. This is conditional upon the fact that he perfects or completes his Islam. That is, it is conditional that he remain away from the evil deeds after he becomes a Muslim.

This understanding is further supported by a hadith in both *Sahih al-Bukhari* and *Sahih Muslim* in which ibn Masood asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) if they were to be held accountable for the deeds that they performed in pre-Islamic times. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) told him, "As for the one of you who excels in Islam, he will not be held accountable for it. As for the one who does evil [with respect to his Islam], he shall be held accountable for what he did in pre-Islamic times as well as in Islam."

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[94] Recorded by Muslim.

[95] Recorded by Malik and al-Nasaa'i. According to al-Albaani, it is *sahih*. Al-Albani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 1, p. 122.



There is also a hadith in *Musnad Ahmad* which states, while the Prophet (peace be upon him) was speaking to Amr ibn al-As, "O Amr, didn't you know that Islam wipes away all of the sins that one performed before it."[96] This hadith must be understood in the light of the previously mentioned hadith: if a person completes his Islam and excels in Islam, then all of his previous sins will be erased and overlooked. Otherwise, if he continues to perform such evil acts in Islam, his previous acts will not be overlooked.[97] However, this only applies to sins and evil deeds with respect to Allah. It does not include obligations that one still has to fulfill, such as debts or crimes that one may be punished for in this world.

Furthermore, there is even a stronger passage in the Quran. Allah says, "And those who do not invoke any other god along with Allah, nor kill such life as Allah has forbidden, except for just cause, nor commit illegal sexual intercourse and whoever does this shall receive the punishment. The torment will be doubled to him on the Day of Resurrection, and he will abide therein in disgrace; Except those who repent and believe, and do righteous deeds, for those, Allah will change their sins into good deeds, and Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (25:68-70).

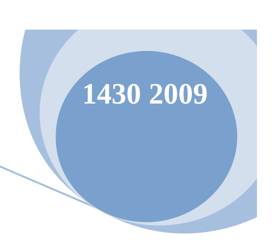
Some scholars feel that that verse implies that previous evil deeds will be turned into good deeds. However, some say that it means that the person will then do good deeds in this life. Yet others say that it means that in the Hereafter the evil deeds will be transformed and the person will be rewarded for them due to the worry and remorse that he suffered because of them after becoming a Muslim.

In sum, the new Muslim convert is facing a very great opportunity. He is being given the opportunity to have all of his previous ills and sins immediately cancelled while possibly still being rewarded for good that he did before embracing Islam. This is part of Allah's grace and mercy. It is conditional though. The convert must take his Islam seriously, practice it properly and be a true Muslim while keeping himself from falling into the evils that he practiced before becoming a Muslim. If he somehow allows himself to fall back into his evil

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[96] This narration is from *Musnad Ahmad. Sahih Muslim* has virtually the same with a slight change in the wording.

[97] Ibn Rajab, *Jaami*, vol. 1, p. 296.



practices of old, he then loses a great opportunity that Allah has graciously offered him.

Finally, there is a verse in the Quran and another hadith that deals specifically with the members of the People of the Book who convert to Islam. These people believed in earlier books and earlier prophets and then took the further necessary step of also believing wholeheartedly in the final prophet and book that their own prophets and books alluded to. Allah says about them, "And indeed now We have conveyed the Word, in order that they may receive admonition. Those to whom We gave the Scripture before it, - they believe in it (the Quran). And when it is recited to them, they say: 'We believe in it. Verily, it is the truth from our Lord. Indeed even before it we have been from those who submit themselves to Allah as Muslims.'[98] These will be given their reward twice over, because they are patient, and repel evil with good, and spend (in charity) out of what We have provided them" (28:51-54).

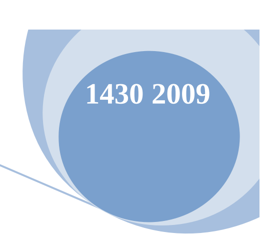
The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, "There are three who will receive their rewards twice. [One of them is] a believer from the People of the Book who believed in his prophet and then also believed in Muhammad. He will receive two rewards..."[99]

A Convert's Wealth Earned Prior to Islam

When a non-Muslim embraces Islam, it is very likely that some portion of his wealth has come from sources that Islam considers illegitimate. For example, the convert could have money that resulted from interest-bearing transac-

[98] This is in reference to some Jews and Christians who embraced Islam.

[99] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim. Some scholars argue that this hadith refers only to Christians who convert to Islam because the message of the Prophet Jesus had abrogated the message of the earlier prophets. In other words, the Jew who rejects Jesus (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) does not truly believe in his own prophets because Jesus was also sent to the Tribe of Israel. His rejecting of Jesus implies his rejection of what his own prophet has brought. Hence, he is not a true believer and the words of the hadith above do not apply to him. The Prophet's words, though, are more general than that and should be understood in its general sense. Furthermore, it is confirmed that the verses quoted above applied equally to the Jews and Christians. See ibn Hajar, *Fath*, vol. 1, pp. 190-191.



tions and investment, selling or serving alcohol and so on. What should the new Muslim then do with such wealth that is already in his possession?[100]

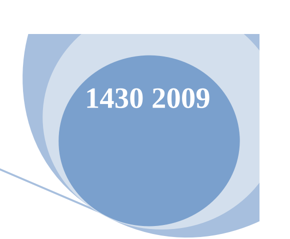
The general rule is that any wealth that one has in one's possession at the time of conversion remains the property of the convert regardless of how that wealth was gained, as long as it was gained in a legal fashion according to the laws the convert was living by. The individual is not held responsible for his lack of applying Islamic principles prior to his conversion. Thus, for example, Allah says, "Those who after receiving direction from their Lord, desist, shall be pardoned for the past" (2:275). This verse demonstrates that Allah overlooks the actions that one performs before the rulings reach him and he is obligated to follow such regulations.

Numerous people embraced Islam during the lifetime of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) yet there is no record of him asking any of them about the wealth in their possession and how they obtained such wealth. Indeed, even marriages that took place before the conversion were not questioned or examined to see if their contracts met the Islamic standards. In fact, there are various reports that demonstrate that the Prophet explicitly approved of the converts keeping the wealth in their possession. Actually, the person earned such wealth believing that there was nothing wrong with what they were doing. Hence, they are allowed to keep such wealth. Their case is different from a Muslim who knowingly deals in alcohol, for example. Such a Muslim, even after repenting from such an act, is not to keep that ill-earned wealth.

However, the situation is different if the convert has, at the time of his conversion, not yet received money that is from a source that Islam considers illegitimate. For example, the individual could have sold and delivered someone alcohol on July 1 but the agreement between them is that he is not to be paid until December 1. In the meantime, say in September, the one who sold the alcohol converts to Islam. It is possible to look at this and say that since the contract was concluded before his conversion, he is still entitled to this money, as this is wealth he earned before becoming Muslim.

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[100] For more details on this issue, see Abbaas al-Baaz, *Ahkaam al-Maal al-Haraam* (Amman, Jordan: Daar al-Nafaa`is, 1999), pp. 121-134. Al-Baaz's work is the main reference for this section.

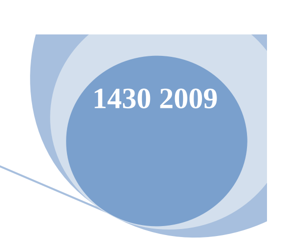


However, the majority of the scholars state that he no longer has the right to that money. They quote, "Those who after receiving direction from their Lord, desist, shall be pardoned for the past" (2:275) once again. Now, the admonition has come to him and he can only keep what he received earlier and must forego anything additional. Allah also says, "If you repent, you shall have your principle" (2:279). Thus, for example, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) abolished all of the interest-bearing agreements during a speech in Makkah after many people had just embraced Islam. Hence, although those contracts were concluded before they had embraced Islam, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) clearly voided the forbidden aspect of the contract.

In sum, once an individual embraces Islam he should from that moment on forego and not accept any wealth that is earned through forbidden means, regardless of whether the contract for that wealth took place before his conversion. Actually, now the individual should believe that such money is forbidden and therefore he himself should no longer wish to receive it or benefit from it. Given the nature of contracts nowadays, he may not be able to cancel the contract. If he is forced to receive such money, he should give it away and free himself from it. (Many mosques have specific accounts for monies received through illegitimate means but which one is forced to receive, such as interest on deposits, and will use that money is very specific ways as recommended by the scholars.)

Pre-Islamic Marriages

There is no question that Islam affirms the marriages that took place outside of Islam or before a person embraced Islam. The evidence for this is numerous. For example, in *Soorah al-Masad,* Allah refers to the wife of Abu Lahab, the Prophet's uncle who vigorously opposed him, as well as to the wife of the Pharaoh. Numerous Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) were born before the advent of Islam and they were considered legitimate children of their parents. Indeed, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) never ordered married Companions to remarry within Islam. In fact, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) did not even ask them about the circumstances of their marriage contract, such as whether there were witnesses and so forth.



However, those relationships that were considered illegitimate by a convert's previous religion or law are also considered illegitimate in Islam. Thus, for example, one's illegitimate child before embracing Islam remains illegitimate after one's embracing of Islam.[101] On the other hand, any children born via a legitimate pre-Islamic marriage will be considered legitimate children and continue to be the children of the Muslim convert.

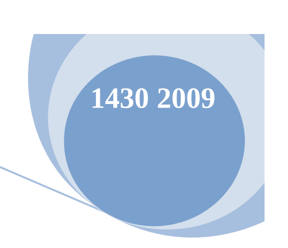
One exception to this general principle of affirming pre-Islamic marriages is where the husband and wife are within the prohibited degrees of marriage. Thus, for example, in ancient Persia, brothers and sisters could marry one another. Such a marriage would be considered void as soon as either of the couple embraced Islam. Furthermore, in a polygynous situation, if a man is married to more than four wives, upon embracing Islam he must separate from some of them and may have, at the most, only four wives.

Some other important issues related to conversion to Islam must be touched upon. If a husband and a wife both embrace Islam at approximately the same time, then their marriage remains in tact and there is no need for them to take any further steps. If a man who is married to either a Christian or Jewish woman embraces Islam, the marriage also remains in tact and there is also no need for any further steps.[102] Those cases are clear and non-problematic. The problematic cases are: (1) a male convert married to a woman who is not Christian, Jewish or accepting of Islam; (2) a female convert married to a non-Muslim husband.[103]

[101] Cf., Muhammad ibn Abu Bakr ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyyah. *Ahkaam Ahl al-Dhimmah* (Damam, Saudi Arabia: Zamaadi li-l-Nashr, 1997), vol. 2, pp. 764f.

[102] This is based on the verse, "Made lawful to you this day are all good things. The food of the people of the Scripture (Jews and Christians) is lawful to you and yours is lawful to them. (Lawful to you in marriage) are chaste women from the believers and chaste women from those who were given the Scripture (Jews and Christians) before your time, when you have given their due bridal money, desiring chastity not committing illegal sexual intercourse, nor taking them as girl-friends" (5:5).

[103] Although there is a great deal of difference of opinion concerning some of these issues, the author is following the conclusions reached by ibn al-Qayyim in *Ahkaam Ahl al-Dhimmah* (vol. 2, pp. 640-695). Ibn al-Qayyim has discussed these questions in great detail and has supported his opinion with strong, conclusive arguments.



The pertinent verses of the Quran related to these issues are as follows: Allah says, "O you who believe! When believing women come to you as emigrants, examine them, Allah knows best as to their faith. Then if you ascertain that they are true believers, send them not back to the disbelievers, they are not lawful (wives) for the disbelievers nor are the disbelievers lawful (husbands) for them" (60:10).

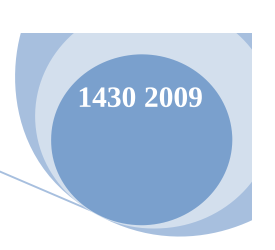
Allah also says, "And do not marry polytheistic women till they believe (and worship Allah Alone). And indeed a slave woman who believes is better than a (free) polytheistic woman, even though she pleases you. And give not (your daughters) in marriage to polytheistic men till they believe (in Allah Alone) and verily, a believing slave is better than a (free) polytheistic man, even though he pleases you. Those [polytheists] invite you to the Fire, but Allah invites (you) to Paradise and Forgiveness by His Leave, and makes His signs clear to mankind that they may remember" (2:221).

According to ibn al-Qayyim, when a woman married to a non-Muslim converts to Islam, the marriage becomes suspended and non-binding. In other words, she no longer is his wife in the sense of having marital relations or him being financially responsible for her.[104] However, the woman is free to choose between ending the marriage (thereby being free to marry somebody else but only after her waiting period is finished) or suspending the marriage in the sense of waiting for her husband to embrace Islam. In the latter case, whenever the man embraces Islam, the woman automatically returns to him as a wife with no need for a new marriage contract, even if the husband's conversion took place many years after that of the wife.

The strongest evidence for this conclusion is the case of the Prophet's own daughter, Zainab. She embraced Islam but her husband, Abu al-Aas ibn al-Rabee, refused to do so for many years. Then, finally, after six years, he came to Madinah and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) reunited the couple without a new marriage contract or dower.[105]

[104] He is not financially responsible for her because she is the one choosing this option while at the same time she is not making herself available to him as a wife.

[105] Ibn al-Qayyim (vol. 2, p. 650) also presents a story in which Zainab's husband was coming to Madinah and she asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) whether he could stay at her residence. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told her, "He is your



If a man embraces Islam and his wife is not a Muslim, Jew or Christian, then his retaining her as a wife will be harmful to her, as he will not be allowed to have marital relations with her or treat her as a full wife. Thus, in this case, the marriage comes to an end if the woman refuses to embrace Islam. Allah says, "Likewise hold not the disbelieving women as wives" (60:10).

Changing One's Name Upon Becoming a Muslim

It has become common practice in some areas for converts to change their names upon becoming Muslims. Sometimes this is done so that the convert feels more attached and affiliated with the Muslim community. The obvious question that arises is: Is this changing of the name required, recommended or simply permissible? On this point, Abdul Azeez ibn Baaz stated in response to a question he had received,

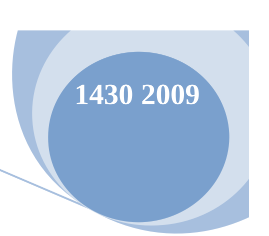
I inform you that there is no evidence in Islamic Law that requires one whom Allah has guided to Islam to change his name to an Islamic name. [The exception is if] there is an Islamic reason that requires that. For example, if a person has a name implying the worship of someone other than Allah, such as "The Servant of Jesus" and so forth, or if the person has a name that is not good to have and there are better names than that, such as the name "Grievous" can be changed to "Mild." Similar is the case with any other name that is not considered proper for one to be named. However, it is obligatory to change the name that implies worshipping other than Allah. Concerning other [repugnant] names, then it is simply preferred and recommended to change such names. Included in this second category of names are those names that are well-known to be Christian names such that if one hears them he will think that the person must be a Christian. To change one's name under those circumstances is good.[106]

Bilal Philips has some further insight into this question:

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husband but he cannot be in [physical] contact with you." This demonstrates that the marriage is suspended. It is neither a full marriage nor are the two completely separated. Unfortunately, though, this author was not able to trace this story through any other sources besides this reference.

[106] Ali Abu Lauz, compiler, *Answers to Common Questions from New Muslims* (Ann Arbor, MI: IANA, 1995), pp. 22-23.

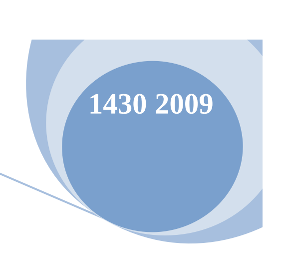


New Muslims, unaware of the Islamic naming system[107], often adopt Arabic names in the chaotic European style... In fact, those of African descent often erase even their family names on the basis that these names are remnants from the days of slavery. That is, those of their ancestors who were slaves usually adopted the family name of their slave masters and it was the slave masters' name which was handed down from generation to generation. Hence, an individual who may have been called Clive Baron Williams while his father's name was George Herbert Williams may, upon entering Islaam, rename himself Faisal 'Umar Nkruma Mahdi. However, his name according to the Islamic naming system should have been Faisal George Williams, that is, Faisal the son of George Williams. Whether "Williams" was the name of his ancestors' plantation owner or not is of no consequence. Since his father's name was George Williams, he is, according to the Islamic naming system, the son of George Williams… The practice among new Muslims of deleting their family names has frequently created deep resentment among their non-Muslim families which could have been easily avoided if the Islamic naming system had been adopted. Actually, the new Muslim is under no obligation to change even his or her "Christian name" unless it contains an un-Islamic meaning. Thus, the given name Clive, which means cliff-dweller need not have been changed whereas "Dennis" (Fr. Denys), a variation of Dionysius which means He of Dionysus (the Greek god of wine and fertility who was worshipped with orgiastic rites), would have to be changed… However, it is perfectly acceptable for a Muslim, whether a recent convert or not, to change his or her first name. It was the Prophet's practice to change peoples first names if they were too assuming, negative or un-Islamic. One of the Prophet's wives was originally named Barrah (pious) and he changed it to Zaynab as Allaah had said in the Qur'aan, "Do not claim piety for yourselves for He knows best who is God-fearing."(53:32)… However, Allaah's messenger never changed the names of people's fathers, no matter how un-Islamic they may have been… Thus, it can be concluded that erasing one's family name is against both the letter and the spirit of Islamic law. The father's first and last name should be retained and if the father is unknown, the mother's first and last name should follow the Muslim's given or chosen name.[108]

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[107] The Islamic naming system that he is referring to is wherein the person is known as, "So and so the son of so and so." After that, a tribal or regional name may also be added.

[108] Bilal Philips, *Tafseer of Soorah al-Hujuraat* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, 1988), pp. 120-122.



The Fruits of Becoming a Muslim

Earlier many of the important features of Islam were presented. Before concluding this chapter, the author would like to emphasize some of the important fruits that are bestowed upon a Muslim due to his conversion and following attachment to Islam.

It is important to note and appreciate that all of the benefits of Islam accrue to the human. It is solely for his own benefit that Allah has provided His guidance to humankind. Allah, Himself, is not in need of humankind's worship. He is free of all needs but in His Mercy He has shown humankind the proper mode of behavior to meet His approval. Thus, He says, "Whoever goes right, then he goes right only for the benefit of his ownself. And whoever goes astray, then he goes astray to his own loss. No one laden with burdens can bear another's burden" (17:15). In addition, those who reject Islam are only harming themselves. Allah says, "Truly! Allah wrongs not mankind in aught; but mankind wrong themselves" (10:44).

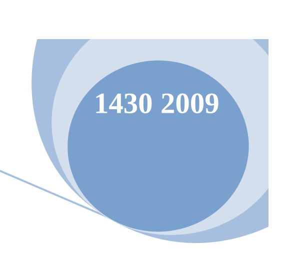
(A) Knowing Allah, the individual's God, Lord and Creator

The greatest benefit of becoming a Muslim and growing in Islam is that the individual is able to truly know Allah. The believer knows Allah not in some vague, dry, philosophical sense. Instead, for example, the believer knows Allah in detail via His Names and Attributes, the knowledge of which Allah has graciously provided in the Quran and Sunnah. Every one of Allah's names should lead a person to greater love of Allah as well as greater fear of Him, accompanied by attempting to get closer to Him with those great attributes by performing righteous deeds.[109]

Ibn Taimiyyah noted, "Whoever knows the names of Allah and their meanings, believing in them, will have a more complete faith than the one who does not know them but just believes in them in general."[110] Ibn Saadi

[109] Ibn al-Qayyim noted that every one of Allah's names obligates a specific form of worship from the human in response to that name and attribute of Allah. See Muhammad ibn al-Qayyim, *Miftaah Daar al-Sa'adah* (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, n.d.), vol. 2, p. 90.

[110] Ahmad ibn Taimiyyah, *Majmoo Fatawaa Shaikh al-Islaam ibn Taimiya* (Collected by Abdul Rahmaan Qaasim and his son Muhammad, no publication information given), vol. 7, p. 234. Also



also noted, "Whenever a person's knowledge of Allah's beautiful names and attributes increases, his faith also increases and his certainty is further strengthened."[111] If one has a good knowledge of Allah's names and attributes, one will then have an opening to understanding what takes place in this creation. This fact was beautifully expressed by ibn al-Qayyim when he said, "Whoever knows Allah, knows everything other than Him. Whoever is ignorant of his Lord is even more ignorant of everything other than Him."[112]

Indeed, the effect of this knowledge should be so great that a true understanding of those names and living according to their implications should lead one directly to Allah's pleasure and paradise. In fact, the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) clearly told this Muslim nation, "Allah has ninety-nine names, one hundred less one. Whoever memorized them all by heart will enter Paradise."[113]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) described the type of transformation that takes place when the individual really knows Allah and has thereby truly tasted the sweetness of faith. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "[There are] three characteristics that if a person has them, he has tasted the sweetness of faith: that Allah and His Messenger are more beloved to him than anything else; that he loves a person and he only loves him for the sake of Allah; and that he hates to return to unbelief in the same way that he hates to be thrown into the Fire."[114]

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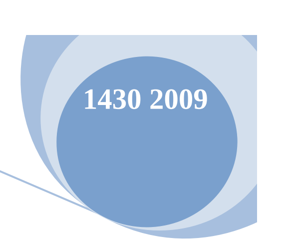
see Fauz bint Abdul Lateef al-Kurdi, *Tahqeeq al-Uboodiyyah bi-Ma'rifah al-Asmaa wa al-Sifaat* (Riyadh: Daar Taibah, 1421 A.H.), p. 163.

[111] Quoted in al-Kurdi, p. 164.

[112] Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madaarij al-Saalikeen bain Manaazil Iyyaaka Na'budu wa Iyyaaka Nasta'een* (Beirut: Daar al-Kitaab al-Arabi, n.d.), vol. 3, p. 351.

[113] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim. The above is Muhammad Muhsin Khan's translation of the hadith. He also added the following footnote, "Memorizing Allah's Names means to believe in those Qualities of Allah derived from those Names and should be accompanied by good deeds which Allah's Names inspire us to do. Just knowing Allah's Names by heart will not make a vicious man enter Paradise. Therefore, the word 'memorized' in the Hadith means to behave in accordance with the implications of Allah's Names." Muhammad Muhsin Khan, *The Translation of the Meanings of Sahih al-Bukhari* (Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers and Distributors, 1997), vol. 9, p. 296.

[114] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

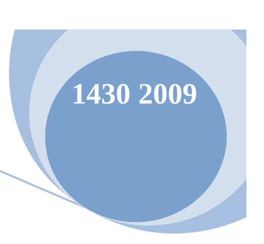


There is still another further very important and fascinating aspect. This is an aspect that some seem to overlook although Allah has mentioned it in various places in the Quran. This Islam engenders in the human a special type of relationship with his Creator and God. It is a relationship which, as Allah Himself describes it, leads the individual *to be pleased with his Lord*. In other words, the person develops an appreciation of Allah. Allah becomes dear to Him. The individual becomes pleased with Allah because he begins to understand the beauty, excellence and perfection of Allah and all that Allah wills. It becomes no longer a matter of submitting to the One who deserves such submission and obedience. It becomes a matter of appreciating who Allah is, what Allah has decreed, what Allah has commanded and what Allah will do to the humans.

The individual realizes that he can experience nothing but pleasure with Allah. Islam, thus, allows the person to truly understand and appreciate his Lord and Creator, such that he becomes very happy with his Lord, leading him in turn to want to become pleasing as well to his Lord. Thus, Allah says, for example: "And the first to embrace Islam of the Emigrants and the Helpers and also those who followed them exactly (in Faith). Allah is well-pleased with them as they are well-pleased with Him. He has prepared for them Gardens under which rivers flow (Paradise), to dwell therein forever. That is the supreme success" (9:100); Allah will say: 'This is a Day on which the truthful will profit from their truth: theirs are Gardens under which rivers flow (in Paradise) - they shall abide therein forever. Allah is pleased with them and they with Him. That is the great success (Paradise)'" (5:119); (see also 58:22 and 98:8).

(B) True Happiness

Allah says, "Whenever there comes to you Guidance from Me, and whoever follows My Guidance, there shall be no fear on them, nor shall they grieve" (2:38). Allah has emphasized these words when He said, "But if, as is sure, there comes to you guidance from Me, whosoever follows My guidance, will not lose his way, nor fall into misery. But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment. He will say, 'O my Lord! Why have You raised me up blind, while I had sight (before)?' (Allah) will say, 'Thus did you, when



Our Signs came to you, disregard them, so will you, this day, be disregarded'" (20:123-127).

God is an individual's Creator. In addition, it is the knowledge of Him and the relationship with Him that the soul is seeking. Hence, without this relationship, sorrow will enter into a person's life. On the other hand, knowing Allah and establishing the proper relationship with Him will bring about true happiness.

Throughout history, scholars and pious people have tried to express the joy and contentment that enters into their hearts via knowing their Lord. A famous scholar of Islam, Ibn Taimiyyah, attempted to express the joy that he felt from his faith in Allah and the deeds he performed. He once said, "In this world there is a Paradise that whoever does not enter it will not enter the Paradise in the Hereafter." He also said, "What can my enemies do to me? Certainly, my paradise and garden are in my chest."[115] In fact, ibn al-Qayyim, ibn Taimiyyah's closest student who would visit him often in the citadel prison, stated,

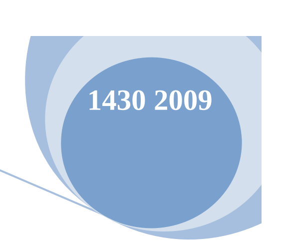
> Allah knows that I have never seen anyone having a better life than him. [This was true] even though he was in straitened circumstances and not living in luxuries and comforts. On the contrary, he was on the opposite extreme. Even though he faced imprisonment, torture and threats, he still had the most pleasurable life among the people, with the most relaxed feelings, strongest in heart and happiest of all of them. The experiencing of joy could be seen on his face. Whenever we were very fearful, feeling bad expectations and felt the earth constricting upon us, we would come to him and we only needed to see him and listen to his words that all of those emotions would leave us. Instead, we would be filled with rest, strength, certainty and tranquility. Exalted be the One who allows His servant to witness His Paradise before he meets Him.[116]

Of course, such a beautiful feeling from one's faith was not restricted to ibn Taimiyyah. Ibn al-Qayyim quotes another devout Muslim as saying, "If the kings and the children of the kings knew what [felicity] we are in, they would

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[115] Quoted in Muhammad ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Waabil al-Sayyib min al-Kalim al-Tayyib* (Beirut: Daar al-Bihaar, 1986), p. 73.

[116] Ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Waabil al-Sayyib*, p. 73.



fight us over it with their swords." Yet another stated, "The inhabitants of this world are miserable. They leave this world and they do not taste the most wonderful aspect that it contains." When asked what that was, he replied, "Love for Allah, knowing Him and remembering Him." Ibn al-Qayyim also quoted another who said, "There comes some times in which I say, 'If the people of Paradise are in a state like this, they are enjoying a good life.'"[117]

One author noted, "[The fruits of purification of the soul] are perpetual fruits for every times. The servant finds their taste, experiences their sweetness and moves about in its pleasures. Every time the person increases in the steps of purification, those fruits likewise increase."[118] Ibn al-Qayyim further stated,

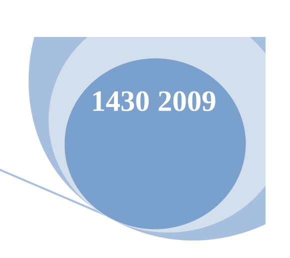
Do not consider that Allah's words, "Indeed, the righteous will be in pleasure and indeed the wicked will be in Hell-fire" [82:13-14] are restricted only to the pleasures and hell of the Hereafter alone. Actually, it applies to their [humans'] three stages, that is, the life in this world, the life in *al-barzakh* [after death and before resurrection] and the life in the permanent abode [after resurrection]. Those [purified souls] are in pleasure while the others are in a hell. Isn't pleasure only the pleasure of the heart and punishment only the punishment of the heart? What punishment can be harsher than fear, worry, anxiety and uneasiness [faced by those whose souls are not purified]? [What can be harsher than] its turning away from Allah and the abode of the Hereafter, its clinging on to something other than Allah and its being disconnected from Allah?[119]

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[117] See ibn al-Qayyim, *al-Waabil al-Sayyib*, pp. 73. Ibn al-Qayyim also quoted ibn Taimiyyah as saying, "If you do not find any sweetness and relaxation in your heart from a [good] deed, then you should suspect your heart. Verily, Allah is grateful. That is, He must reward the doer of a deed for his deed in this world by a sweetness he finds in his heart, a stronger feeling of relaxation and a joy in his eyes. If the person does not find these things, it means that something has entered upon his deed [and made it not correct and purely for Allah's sake]." See ibn al-Qayyim, *Madaarij*, vol. 2, p. 68.

[118] Anas Karzoon, *Manhaj al-Islaam fi Tazkiah al-Nafs* (Jeddah: Daar Noor al-Maktabaat, 1997), vol. 2, p. 753.

[119] Muhammad ibn al-Qayyim, *Al-Jawaab al-Kaafi liman Sa`ala an al-Dawaa al-Shaafi* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1983), p. 88-89.



(C)Being Just with One's Own Self:

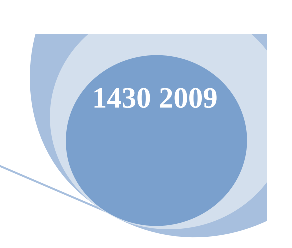
Associating partners with Allah is a great form of wrongdoing. In particular, one is completely wronging one's own soul and dignity by submitting to and worshipping beings that do not deserve a human's worship whatsoever. Allah has stated in the Quran, while quoting Luqmaan, "Indeed associating [partners with Allah] is a great wrongdoing" (31:13). Thus, Allah has said in the Quran, "O believers! Verily, the polytheists are impure" (9:28). This is a spiritual impurity, illustrating that one is denigrating one's soul.

Once the concept of pure monotheism is truly understood and embodied in a person, there is a certain type of nobility (for lack of a better word) and feeling of purpose that accompanies the soul. The person realizes that he is not to submit to, physically bow down or prostrate to anything or anyone other than Allah. He does not turn in his prayers to anyone other than Allah, nor can anyone grant him forgiveness save Allah. He does not turn to dead humans who, in reality, were no more than humans themselves. He does not sit at the base of wooden or metal idols that other humans themselves actually created. He does not fear any form of spirits such that he has to appease them by offering sacrifices to them. Furthermore, such a person will base his life on his belief in there being only one true God.

All of these things are forbidden to him by the concept of monotheism. But they are more than simply forbidden for him. He understands full well that all of these acts are not becoming a human being that Allah has created for a very special and noble purpose. All of these acts are beneath a human and, in fact, it is inconceivable that a person who has a sane understanding of reality would ever take part in those types of acts. Why should a human bow down and pray to another human who has to eat and drink to survive just like himself? How could anyone claim that another being has any share in the divinity with Allah and therefore is deserving of having others humble and prostrate themselves before him?

(D) Being Rescued from Earning Allah's Punishment

Allah says in the Quran, "Everyone shall taste death. And only on the Day of Resurrection shall you be paid your wages in full. And whoever is removed



away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise, he indeed is successful. The life of this world is only the enjoyment of deception (a deceiving thing)" (3:185).

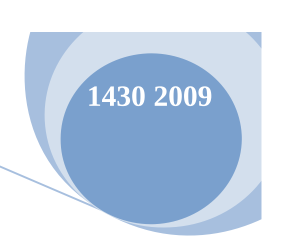
Indeed, every human shall have to face the reality of death. After death, every individual will have to stand in front of his Lord and will be held accountable for all of his actions. For many among humankind, their beliefs, attitudes and actions will lead them to only one fate: the punishment and wrath of Allah. Being saved from that recompense is one of the greatest achievements anyone could possibly attain.

On the Day of Resurrection the difference between those who believed and those who refused to do so will be great. Note how Allah describes the events of that Day. Allah has said, "O mankind, fear your Lord! For the convulsion of the Hour (of Judgment) will be a thing terrible! The Day you shall see it, every mother giving suck shall forget her suckling babe, and every pregnant female shall drop her load (unformed): you shall see mankind as in a drunken riot, yet not drunk: but dreadful will be the Wrath of Allah" (22:1-2); Allah also says, "Finally, when the Trumpet is sounded, that will be—that Day—a Day of distress, far from easy for those who disbelieve" (74: 8-10).

The disbelievers, due to their attitudes in this life and their intention to forever behave in the way that they were living, shall be devoid of all good on that Day. Allah will not bless them in any fashion and will not even look at them with any pleasure or approval. As Allah has stated (in more than one place) about the disbelievers, "As for those who sell the faith they owe to Allah and their own plighted word for a small price, they shall have no portion in the Hereafter, nor will Allah (deign to) speak to them or look at them on the Day of Judgment, nor will He purify them (of sin). They shall have a grievous Penalty" (3:77).

(E) Allah's Pleasure and Paradise in the Hereafter

Allah's pleasure and one's happiness in the Hereafter are the greatest and most important results of being a true Muslim. The life of the Hereafter is the only real life to be sought. Yet that real life will only be granted to those who can raise themselves above the lowly desires of this worldly life by seek-



ing Allah's pleasure instead. Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "No one shall enter Paradise except a believer."[120]

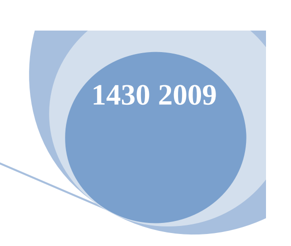
In other words, such a great and blessed life will only be for those who believed, practice Islam and purified their souls, thus pleasing Allah and deserving His blessed reward of Paradise in the Hereafter. It will not be for those who do evil in this life and who turn their back on Allah's guidance. Allah reminds all of mankind of this fact when He says, "That abode of the Hereafter We shall give to those who intend not high-handedness or mischief on earth: and the end is (best) for the righteous" (28:83).

In fact, not only will Allah rescue the believers and purified souls from such a punishment on that Day, Allah will further purify them of all or any of remaining sins such that they will then be in a state where they are allowed to enter into Paradise. This is a special blessing that only comes to those who sought to purify themselves with belief and good deeds in this life.

Actually, the true Muslim and believer will experience happiness in all stages of his life. As noted earlier, he experiences true happiness in this life while others are seeking imaginary or mirage-type happiness. At the time of his death, also, his soul will flow freely from his body surrounded by a beautiful smell as he begins to experience the first taste of the pleasures of the Hereafter. The angels come to him and give him glad tidings of the things to come.

Allah has beautifully described what will occur in the following verse, "In the case of those who say, 'Our Lord is Allah,' and, further stand straight and steadfast, the angels descend on them (from time to time): 'Fear not nor grieve! But receive the glad tidings of the garden (of bliss) that you were promised. We are your protectors in this life and in the Hereafter: therein shall you have all that your souls shall desire; therein shall you have all that you ask for! A hospitable gift from One Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful!'" (41: 30-32; also see 10:62-64).

[120] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



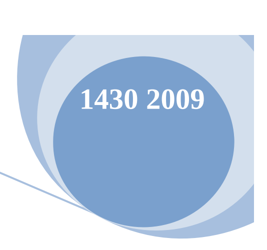
In the grave, also, he will experience happiness as his grave is expanded for him and he can see his seat in Paradise while the disbeliever's grave is constricted upon him as he is viewing his seat in the Hell-fire.

Allah describes the believers on the Day of Resurrection with the following beautiful words, "Those for whom the good (record) from Us has gone before will be removed far therefrom. Not the slightest sound will they hear of Hell. They shall dwell in what their souls desired. The Great Terror will bring them no grief: but the angels will meet them (with mutual greetings): 'This is your Day, (the Day) that you were promised'" (21:101-103); and Allah says, "But Allah will deliver the righteous to their place of salvation: no evil shall touch them, nor shall they grieve" (39:61).

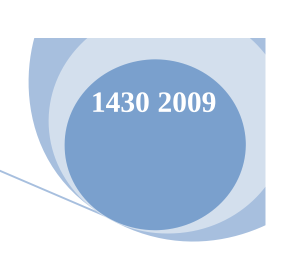
The believers will be saved all of the discomforts of the Day of Resurrection until they are granted entrance into Paradise: "(To the righteous soul will be said:) 'O soul in (complete) rest and satisfaction! Come back to your Lord, well pleased (yourself), and well-pleasing unto Him! Enter, then, among My servants. Yea, enter My Heaven'" (89:27-30); "And those who feared their Lord will be led to the Garden in crowds: until behold, they arrive there; its gates will be opened; and its keepers will say, 'Peace be upon you! You have done well! Enter here, to dwell therein.' They will say, 'Praise be to Allah, Who has truly fulfilled His promise to us, and has given us (this) land in heritage: we can dwell in the Garden as we will: how excellent a reward for those who work (righteousness)'" (39:73-74).

In reality, above and beyond all of that is that they shall receive Allah's good pleasure. Allah says, "Allah has promised to the believers—men and women—gardens under which rivers flow, to dwell therein, and beautiful mansions in gardens of everlasting bliss. But the greatest bliss is the good pleasure of Allah: that is the supreme felicity" (9:72).

Finally, there comes the greatest reward of all for those who purified themselves in this life via true faith, good deeds and excellence in faith: the opportunity to see Allah. Allah has said, "To those who do right is a goodly (reward), yea, more (than in measure)! No darkness or shame shall cover their faces! They are Companions of the Garden; they will abide therein (forever)" (10:26). In a hadith recorded by Muslim, the Messenger of Allah (peace and



blessings of Allah be upon him) explained the “more” as being blessed with the ability to see Allah.



Becoming a Believer [121]

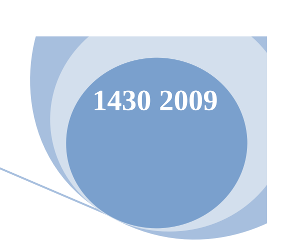
Before discussing the articles of faith, a couple of introductory topics need to be touched upon. The first concerns the definition of "faith" or "belief" from an Islamic perspective. The second concerns the basis of one's faith.

The Definition of "Belief"

For many an English speaker, "belief" simply means the acknowledgment the something is true. Thus, one can be asked, "Do you believe that God exists?" and the reply may be, "Yes." The same person may be asked a follow-up question, "Does your belief in God have any influence or ramifications upon your life, your deeds and your goals?" To this question, the same person who says he believes in God will reply, "No." Given this common scenario, the following question must be addressed: Could this type of belief possibly be equivalent to what Islam means by, for example, "belief in Allah"?

The foundation of one's Islam starts with what is in one's heart and one's beliefs. Thus, Islam has put a great emphasis on what to believe in, as shall be discussed in this chapter. At the same time, though, Islam also stresses what "belief" is supposed to be. Belief, from an Islamic perspective, cannot be something that a person claims is in his heart while it has no influence on the person's life and behavior. On the contrary, the beliefs in the heart should be the driving force behind everything the individual does. The true and effective beliefs never remain at an abstract level but their influence is manifested on a day-to-day practical level. To take a simple example, the question of cheating and stealing is directly related to one's overall belief system. If a person believes that these acts are morally wrong and that there is an all-knowing, just God who will hold him accountable for his deeds, he will most likely refrain from such acts. But if a person does not believe in any eternal ramifications or any day of judgment, his deciding factor may only be the chances of being caught and the severity of the punishment for those acts.

[121] In preparing this chapter in particular, the author benefited greatly from three of his previous works: *What is Islam* (Riyadh: Ministry of Religious Affairs, 2006); *He Came to Teach You Your Religion* (Denver, CO: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 1997); *Purification of the Soul: Concept, Process and Means* (Denver, CO: Al-Basheer Company for Publications and Translations, 2001).

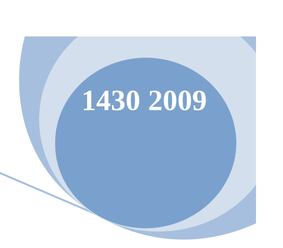


In fact, true belief does much more than make a person realize the negative or positive ramifications of an act. As a person develops in his faith and his beliefs become stronger, his faith molds the very way he looks at thing. His love for something and his hatred for something is determined by his beliefs about that thing. For example, when he recognizes that God loves something, he realizes that that thing must be wonderful and also deserving of his love. On the contrary, if God dislikes something, the individual realizes that that thing must be filled with traits that are deserving of his dislike as well.

One can take the example of smoking. Someone may believe that smoking is harmful and wrong by accepting the facts showing smoking to be harmful as true but he continues to smoke and he does not let what he recognizes to be true guide his actions. In other words, he does not submit to the truth he sees nor does he implement what it implies. His factual knowledge about smoking has not permeated into his heart such that he develops a hatred for smoking due to its evils. Hence, his recognition of the facts is not the same thing as "belief" or, in Quranic terms, *imaan*. *Imaan* necessitates that one has the willingness to submit to or enact what one recognizes to be true. In the case of true belief or *Imaan*, if that *Imaan* is strong and healthy at that moment, then it will put the feeling of hatred in the person's heart for that act that he believes to be wrong or harmful. It will keep the person from wanting to commit that harmful act.

At the same time, it will put the love for all good deeds into his heart. Thus, Allah says, "Allah has endeared the Faith to you and has beautified it in your hearts, and has made disbelief, wickedness and disobedience hateful to you. These! They are the rightly guided ones" (49:7). Such a faith will, therefore, rule his life and it will guide him to what he should do. (If, however, his faith is weak and can be overcome by other forces in the heart, it may not have that effect.)

Therefore, true belief means that one acts in accordance with that belief. When, for example, an individual says that he believes in the angels, it means that he knows that the angels are present and that they are actually recording his deeds. This should affect him in that he will not perform those deeds that he does not want those angels to see and record.



Thus, a thorough study of the Quran and Sunnah shows that faith or *Imaan* has certain components. These components were summed up by the earliest scholars in their saying, "*Imaan* is statement and action." Statement here includes both statement of the heart (affirmation) and statement of the tongue (verbal profession). Action includes both the actions of the heart (willingness to submit, love and so forth) and actions of the body (such as prayer and so forth).[122]

For the sake of clarity, over time, these two components were broken down into the three following essential components of *Imaan* that have also been stated by many scholars: (1) Belief in the heart; (2) Profession by the tongue; (3) Performance of deeds by the physical parts of the body.

In sum, faith, meaning true and definitive belief in something, should lead to a corresponding submission to what one believes in. Otherwise, it is simply an acceptance of a fact but it is not the Islamic concept of "faith" (*imaan*). Thus, Ibn Uthaimeen wrote,

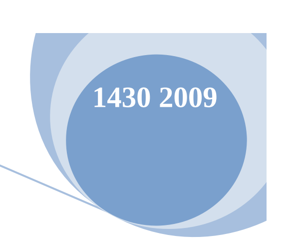
> *Imaan* is the affirmation that requires acceptance and submission. If a person believes in something without acceptance and submission, that is not *imaan*. The evidence for that is that the polytheists [Arabs] believed in Allah's existence and believed in Allah as the Creator, Sustainer, Giver of Life, Bringer of Death and the Manager of the Universe's Affairs. Furthermore, one of them even accepted the messengership of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) but he was not a believer. That person was Abu Talib, the uncle of the Prophet (peace be upon him)… But that [belief in the Prophet (peace be upon him)] will not avail him whatsoever because he did not accept and submit to what the Prophet (peace be upon him) brought.[123]

"A Leap of Faith"

The second introductory issue concerns the basis for one's faith. In the English language, there is a common conception that "faith" implies believing

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[122] Cf., Ahmad ibn Taimiya, *Majmoo Fatawaa Shaikh al-Islaam ibn Taimiya* (collected by Abdul Rahmaan Qaasim and his son Muhammad, no publication information given), vol. 7, p. 672.
[123] Muhammad ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Hadith Jibreel Alaihi al-Salaam* (Dar al-Thuraya, 1415 A.H.), pp. 4-5.

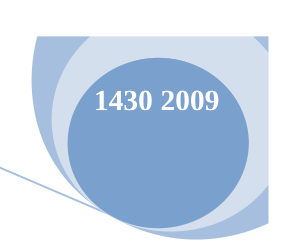


in something that one cannot prove. In other words, "faith" requires what is known as a "leap of faith," where one goes beyond what can be rationally accepted to mere blind acceptance and belief. This approach is very much contrary to the Islamic conception.

From an Islamic perspective, one's faith must be "knowledge-based," so that both the heart and the mind find solace in it and submit to it with a firm resolution. Islam does not demand that humans believe in matters that go against their own nature and reasoning that God has given them. Instead, Allah calls upon humans to reflect—look at the creation, at their own selves and everything around them. Allah points to different aspects of the creation and describes them as signs for those people who reflect.

When humans honestly reflect upon the creation around them, very clear conclusions should result: (1) This existence could not have come about without a wise and intelligent creator and (2) such a wise and intelligent creator would not create this without some purpose behind it. Thus, Allah says, "Verily! In the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are indeed signs for men of understanding. Those who remember Allah standing, sitting, and lying down on their sides, and think deeply about the creation of the heavens and the earth, (saying), 'Our Lord! You have not created (all) this without purpose, glory to You! (Exalted be You above all that they associate with You as partners). Give us salvation from the torment of the Fire'" (3:190-191). Allah also says, "Do they not think deeply (in their own selves) about themselves? Allah has created not the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, except with truth and for an appointed term. And indeed many of mankind deny the Meeting with their Lord" (30:8). Again, Allah says, "Did you think that We had created you in play (without any purpose), and that you would not be brought back to Us?" (23:115).

The Quranic argument is that it is not logically possible to come to any other conclusion. Indeed, if a person believes in God as the Creator, by definition it is unbecoming of such a noble and great Creator to create all of this order and beauty and yet have no purpose behind that creation. A person who believes in a creator yet believes that this creator had no purpose or thought behind his creation is describing a creator that is childlike and unintelligent. It is hard to believe that a creator like that could possibly come up with a crea-

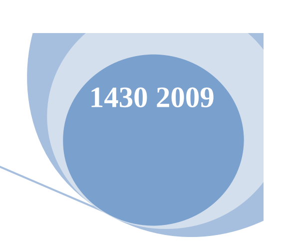


tion like the one that everyone witnesses today. No, indeed, the creation points to certain attributes of the Creator and it points to there being an important and great purpose behind this entire creation. The whole nature of the existence points to the Creator being one of very special character who would not create anything of this nature simply in sport or jest. That Creator could only be Allah with His perfect and sublime attributes—that is, this creation needs Allah and it could not be just and proper except under the control of Allah, exactly as Allah is. Thus, Allah says in the Quran, "Had there been therein (in the heavens and the earth) gods besides Allah, then verily they both[124] would have been ruined. Glorified be Allah, the Lord of the Throne, (High is He) above what they attribute to Him" (21:22).

A second very important conclusion that one can derive by simply pondering over this creation is that the one who created this from nothing can easily recreate it. If He has the ability to recreate things even after their demise, this also means that He has the ability to resurrect them and bring them all in front of Him. This thought, obviously, has very ominous repercussions for humans and their behavior in this world. Thus, Allah points out this fact and reminds humans of its meaning throughout the Quran.

For example, Allah says, "See they not that Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth, is Able to create the like of them. And He has decreed for them an appointed term, whereof there is no doubt. But the wrong-doers refuse [the truth and accept nothing] but disbelief" (17:99). Another set of verses state, "And he [the human] puts forth for Us a parable, and forgets his own creation. He says, 'Who will give life to these bones when they have rotted away and became dust?' Say (to them O Muhammad), 'He will give life to them Who created them for the first time! And He is the All-Knower of every creation! He, Who produces for you fire out of the green tree, when behold, You kindle therewith. Is not He, Who created the heavens and the earth Able to create the like of them? Yes, indeed! He is the All-Knowing Supreme Creator. Verily, His Command, when He intends a thing, is only that He says to it, 'Be!' and it is! So Glorified is He and Exalted above all that they associate with Him, and in Whose Hands is the dominion of all things, and to Him you shall be returned" (36:78-83).

[124] Meaning both the heavens and the earth.

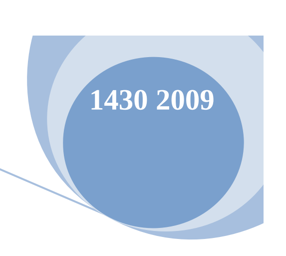


The one who negates the resurrection is expecting that Allah will treat the wrongdoers like the pious people. This is an unbecoming expectation of Allah. Allah makes it clear that such will never be the case, highlighting that such thoughts can only come from those who disbelieve in God. Allah says, "And We created not the heaven and the earth and all that is between them without purpose! That is the consideration of those who disbelieve! Then woe to those who disbelieve from the Fire! Shall We treat those who believe and do righteous good deeds, as the evildoers on earth? Or shall We treat the pious as the wicked?" (38:27-28).

Although it is beyond the scope of this work, the Islamic beliefs in the Quran and the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are also based on clear and direct evidence. The belief in the Quran as being a revelation from God is not a blind belief but is directly related to the miraculous nature and extreme beauty of this book itself. Similarly, believing in the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is also supported by signs pointing to his coming in earlier revelations, the Prophet's own noble character, the victory that God bestowed upon him, the change that was brought about in an entire generation and afterwards under his guidance and so forth.

The point is that the Islamic beliefs in God as the only creator and lord, the belief in a purpose of life, the belief in a resurrection, the belief in the Quran and the belief in the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) are all based on knowledge and an understanding that is consistent with one's human nature. In fact, because they are knowledge-based, any increase in one's knowledge related to these beliefs leads to an increase in one's faith. Thus, knowledge and faith are never battling against each other in Islam. Again, this is because there are no mysteries or absurdities that one is demanded to believe in. Mysteries and absurdities require "leaps of faith" and they are completely absent and alien from Islamic beliefs.[125]

[125] It is true that there may be many things beyond the realm of human experience and direct comprehension. However, even the belief in those matters is based on the beliefs that are justifiable and understandable. For example, some people may not be able to accept the fact that some form of punishment occurs to a person while he is in the grave. He may argue that he sees dead people rotted away in the graves and there is no sign that they are suffering any punishment.



The Articles of Faith

The "articles of faith," or what general categories a Muslims is supposed to be believe in, have been delineated by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in a famous hadith known as the "Hadith of the Angel Gabriel." In that hadith, the Angel asked the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), "What is *imaan* (belief)?" The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied by saying, "It is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, the Last Day and to believe in the divine decree, [both] the good and the evil thereof."[126]

It is important that every Muslim, including every convert, have at least a basic understanding of each of these articles of faith. Thus, each article shall be discussed separately here.

(A) The Belief in Allah

The Islamic belief in God revolves around a pure, unadulterated monotheism, commonly referred to in Arabic as *tauheed*.[127] In order to clarify matters, the scholars divided the discussion of *tauheed* into different branches, each branch covering or explaining one aspect of the complete and correct belief in Allah. These branches are clearly and directly indicated by the Quran and Sunnah.

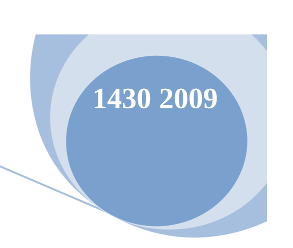
A popular way of discussing *tauheed* is to divide it into three categories.[128] These three categories are *tauheed al-ruboobiyah*, *tauheed al-uloohiyah*[129] and *tauheed al-asma wa al-sifaat*.

However, no one can deny that humans can suffer in many ways even if their physical bodies are not being harmed at all. In fact, a person's mind can even experience imaginary physical pain. In any case, the point is that all these secondary beliefs are completely consistent when the proper premises are understood, such as Allah's great power and ability to create what He wills.

[126] Recorded by Muslim.

[127] The term *tauheed*, meaning "making something one," or "asserting oneness", is not a term from the Quran or Sunnah. However, it became the main term used to cover the aspects of belief in Allah, dating back to the time of the Companion of the Prophet ibn Abbaas.

[128] The dividing of *tauheed* into three categories may be found in a number of works in English. Perhaps, the best discussion is Bilal Philips, *The Fundamentals of Tawheed* (Riyadh: Tawheed Publi-



(1) *Tauheed al-Ruboobiyah*: In essence, this is belief in the uniqueness of Allah with respect to His actions. This is the belief in the Oneness of Allah with respect to His Lordship. He alone is the Lord (*al-Rabb*).[130] He is One without Partner in His Dominion and His Actions. He is the Only Creator, Owner, Nourisher, Maintainer[131] and Sustainer of this creation. All creation has been created by Him and Him alone.

According to ibn Uthaimeen, all of mankind except the most arrogant and haughty accepts and recognizes this aspect of *tauheed*, namely, that there is no Lord and Creator but the One Lord and Creator.[132] This is so because this belief is ingrained in the nature of mankind. Mankind recognizes and realizes that this creation must have had a Creator. Mankind also realizes that this Creator must only be One. It is clear from numerous verses of the Quran that even the polytheistic Arabs knew and recognized that the true and only Creator was above and beyond the idols that they used to worship. For example, Allah says in the Quran, "Say: 'Whose is the earth and whosoever is therein? If you know!' They will say: 'It is Allah's!' Say: 'Will you not then remember?'Say: 'Who is (the) Lord of the seven heavens, and (the) Lord of the Great Throne?' They will say: 'Allah.' Say: 'Will you not then fear Allah (believe in His oneness, obey Him, believe in the Resurrection and Recompense for every good or bad deed)?' Say: 'In Whose Hand is the sovereignty of everything (i.e. treasures of each and everything)? And He protects (all), while against Whom there is no protector, if you know?' They will say: '(All that belongs) to Allah.' Say: 'How then are you deceived and turn away from the truth?" (23:84-89).

However, this belief concerning Allah also necessitates or implies the following aspects: Everything that occurs in this creation is by the Decree, Per-

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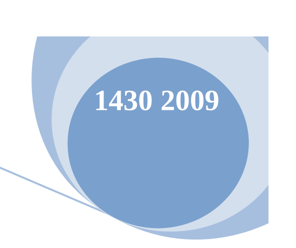
cations, 1990), pp. 1-42. In this work, an attempt will be made to emphasize some points that are not found or discussed in detail in the available English literature.

[129] In particular, this category is sometimes given a slightly different name, such as *tauheed al-ibaada*.

[130] "Lord" is actually not a decent translation for the word *rabb* but will be used here for the lack of a better, more comprehensive word in English.

[131] It is true that there can be other creators, owners and maintainers in this world. However, their abilities to create, own and maintain are limited and not absolute. Absoluteness in these realms belongs only to Allah. Cf., ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Hadith*, pp. 11-14.

[132] Muhammad ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan* (Fairfax, VA: Institute of Islamic and Arabic Sciences in America, 1410 A.H.), p. 19.



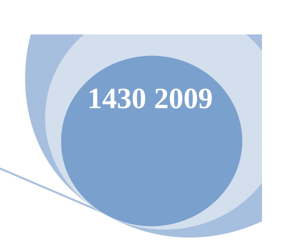
mission and Will of Allah. Sustenance and provisions are from Allah and Allah alone. Life and death are in the Hand of Allah alone. All blessings come from Allah. Guidance and misguidance are by the Will and Permission of Allah. Legislation or prescribing a way of life is the right of Allah alone. Allah alone has knowledge of the unseen. No one has any rights over Allah unless Allah Himself has laid down such upon Himself.

(2) *Tauheed al-Uloohiyah*: This is the oneness of Allah with respect to Him being the only one who is an *ilaah* (God, object of adoration and worship). This is the actualization of *tauheed* as found in the actions of the humans or servants of Allah. This is the meaning of the testimony of faith, "There is none worthy of worship except Allah." This is the reason for which the messengers were sent and the books were revealed. This is the "trial" or test that mankind is facing in this world. Allah has said, "I have not created jinn and mankind except that they should worship and serve Me" (51:56). Allah also says, "And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him" (17:23).

This branch of *tauheed* is the real goal or essence of the teachings of all of the messengers and prophets. The first type of *tauheed*, *tauheed al-ruboobiyah*, is necessary and essential. In reality, there has been very little dispute or controversy over that first type of *tauheed*. Many people would accept the basic concept that the Lord and Creator is One Lord and Creator only. However, this belief must lead to this second form of *tauheed* wherein one directs all of his acts of worship towards Allah and Allah alone. This is why so many Messengers are quoted in the Quran as telling their people, "O my people, worship Allah as you have no other God besides Him" (7:59, 65, 85; 11:50, 61, 84; 23:23 and 32).

Many authors have given definitions for this type of *tauheed* .Al-Qaisi, for example, defined it in the following manner,

This is the knowledge, belief and recognition that Allah has the position of God over all of His creation. This category of *tauheed*— which is called *tauheed al-uloohiyah* or *tauheed al-'ibaada*— requires that one single out Allah alone for all acts of worship. It is the singling out of Allah and the specifying of Him as the object of all acts of worship, external and internal, statements and actions. It is the denial of the worship of anything other than Allah, whatever that other



thing or being might be. It is the negation of any partner with Allah in any form whatsoever and refusal to turn any act of worship to anyone other than Him.

The concept of worship which must be devoted solely to Allah covers everything that is beloved and pleasing to Allah, whether it be acts or statements, both inward or outward, including purity of intention, love, fear, hope, awe, turning to [Him alone], putting one's trust [only in Allah], seeking aid and assistance, seeking a means of approach...[133]

He goes on to mention many acts of worship, including the obvious ones, such as prayer, prostration, fasting, animal sacrifice, pilgrimage and so forth. All of these must be done solely for the sake of Allah. They must also be done in the manner that is prescribed by Allah and that is pleasing to Him. To perform any of these acts for anyone other than Allah negates and destroys one's fulfillment and implementation of *tauheed*.

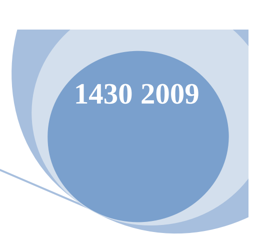
Al-Saadi's definition sheds some further light on this concept. He wrote that *tauheed al-uloohiya*

Is to know and recognize with knowledge and certainty that Allah is the only God and the only one truly deserving of worship. [It is also to verify that] the attributes of Godhood and its meaning are not found in any of [Allah's] creatures. No one is then deserving of worship except Allah. If the person recognizes that and recognizes it correctly, he will reserve all of his external and internal acts of servitude and worship for Allah alone. He will fulfill the external acts of Islam, such as prayer,... Jihad, ordering good and eradicating evil, being dutiful to parents, keeping the ties of kinship, fulfilling the rights of Allah and the rights of His creatures... He will not have any goal in life other than pleasing His Lord and attaining His rewards. In his affairs, he will be following the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). His beliefs will be whatever is proven in the Quran and Sunnah. His deeds and actions will be what Allah and His Messenger legislated. His character and manners will be in imitation of His prophet, in his guidance, behavior and all of his affairs.[134]

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[133] Marwaan al-Qaisi, *Maalim al-Tauheed* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1990), pp. 61-62.

[134] Abdul Rahman Al-Saadi, *Al-Fatawa al-Saa'diyah* (Riyadh: Manshooraat al-Mu'assasat al-Sa'eediyah, n.d), pp. 10-11. The definition al-Saadi gave highlights the fact that *tauheed al-uloohiyah* is composed of *tauheed al-ikhlaas* (where one acts solely and purely for Allah's pleasure), *tauheed al-sidq* (where one acts sincerely and honestly according to this belief) and *tauheed*



This aspect of *tauheed* comprises both the actions of the heart as well as the deeds of the physical body. There are two aspects in particular that must be combined in the worship of Allah. Al-Saadi stated,

The spirit and actuality of worship is by the realization of love and submission to Allah. Complete love and full submission to Allah is the reality of worship. If the act of worship is missing both or one of those components, it is not truly an act of worship. For the reality of worship is found in submission and yielding to Allah. And that will only occur if there is complete and full love [for Allah] which dominates all other expressions of love.[135]

Jaafar Shaikh Idris has aptly described the process that should come about through the correct belief in Allah and how that should lead to the acts of the heart which are essential aspects of *tauheed*. Idris wrote,

When faith enters a person's heart, it causes therein certain mental states, which result in certain apparent actions, both of which are the proof of true faith. Foremost among those mental states is the feeling of gratitude towards God, which could be said to be the essence of *Ibadah* (worshipping or serving God).

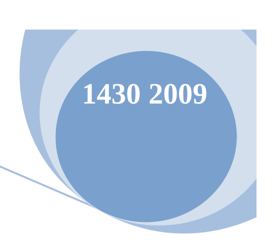
This feeling of gratitude is so important that a nonbeliever is called *kaafir* which means, "one who denies a truth" and also "one who is ungrateful". One can understand why this is so when one reads in the Quran that the main motive for denying the existence of God is that of unjustified pride. Such a proud person feels that it does not become him to be created or governed by a being whom he must thus acknowledge to be greater than himself and to whom he must be grateful. "Those who dispute concerning the signs of God without any authority come to them, in their hearts is only pride that they shall never attain" (*Ghaafir* :56).

With the feeling of gratitude goes that of love: "There are some people who take to themselves [for worship] others apart from God loving them as

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al-tareeq (where the path that one follows is one, that established by the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)). For more on these concepts, see Muhammad al-Hammad, *Tauheed al-Uloohiyah* (Dar ibn Khuzaima, 1414 A.H.), pp. 22-24.

[135] Quoted in al-Hammad, p. 26.



they should love God; But those who believe love God more ardently than they love anything else" (*al-Baqara :* 165).

A believer loves and is grateful to God for His bounties, but being aware of the fact that his good deeds, whether mental or physical, are far from being commensurate with Divine favors, he is always anxious lest because of his sins God should withhold from him some of these favors or punish him in the Hereafter. He therefore fears Him, surrenders himself to Him, and serves Him with great humility.[136]

There is thus no real worship unless the heart is filled with the feeling of love and glorification for Allah. Along with this flows the other necessity components of having hope in Allah and fear of Allah in the heart. Fear of Allah comes about when one truly glorifies and exalts Allah.[137] Hope in Allah flows from a complete and true love of Allah. All of these components must be present and in a proper balance. If they are not present at all or if they are not properly balanced, one's worship becomes distorted and incorrect.[138]

Allah says about some of His true and pious servants, "Verily, they used to hasten to do good deeds. They used to call upon Us with hope and fear. They also would humble themselves before us" (21:90). In reference to the pious and devoted servants Jesus, Uzair and the angels, Allah has said, "They hope for His mercy and fear His torment" (17:57).[139]

This category of *tauheed* is the key to a "real life", a life that is sound and proper. Ibn Taimiyyah wrote,

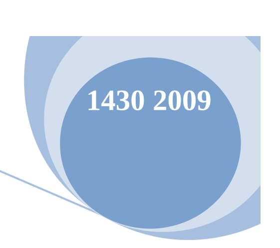
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[136] Jaafar Sheikh Idris, *The Pillars of Faith* (Riyadh: Presidency of Islamic Research, Ifta and Propagation, 1984), pp. 9-10.

[137] Sometimes a person or object is feared but that fear is not combined with complete love. Hence, that fear does not constitute a false form of worship.

[138] There are numerous statements from early scholars stressing the proper balance of the different components of *imaan* in the heart. For example, it is said about fear and hope, "They are like two wings of a bird. The believer flies towards Allah by his two wings of hope and fear. If they are balanced, he flies properly. If one of them is missing, he has a shortcoming. If they are both missing, the bird is on the edge of death." (Quoted in al-Hammad, p. 41.)

[139] Cf., al-Hammad, pp. 34-41.



You must know that a human's[140] need for Allah— that he worship Him and not associate any partner with Him— is a need concerning which there is no comparison that one can make an analogy to. In some matters, it resembles the need of the body for food and drink. However, there are many differences between the two.

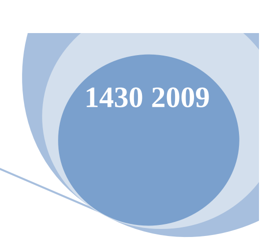
The reality of a human being is in his heart and soul. These cannot be prosperous except through [their relation] with Allah, concerning whom there is no other god. There is [, for example,] no tranquility in this world except in His remembrance. Verily, man is heading toward his Lord and he shall meet Him. He must definitely meet Him. There is no true goodness for him except in meeting Him.[141] If the human experiences any pleasure or happiness other than in Allah, that joy and happiness will not endure. It will move from one nature to another or from one person to another. The person will enjoy it at one time or only some of the time. In fact, sometimes the thing he enjoys and gets pleasure from does not bring him pleasure or enjoyment. Sometimes it even hurts him when it comes to him. And he is even more harmed by that. But his God is definitely always with him under every circumstance and at all times. Wherever he is, He is with him [by His knowledge and aid]…

If someone worships anything other than Allah— even if he loves it and attains some love in this world and some form of pleasure from that— [that false worship] will destroy the person in a way greater than the harmful displeasure that comes to a person who ate poison…

You must know that if anyone loves something other than for the sake of Allah, then that beloved thing will definitely be a cause of harm and punishment… If somebody loves something other than for the sake of Allah, that thing will harm him whether it is with him or he is without it…[142]

In order for any deed to be accepted by Allah, it must be done in accordance with this aspect of *tauheed*. In other words, if a person is fulfilling and understanding this form of *tauheed* properly, this, by necessity, implies that he

[140] The word ibn Taimiya used was *abd* (servant or slave); however, its inference is every human being.
[141] This is because the soul, by its ingrained nature, yearns for its meeting with its Creator.
[142] Ibn Taimiya, *Majmoo*, vol. 1, pp. 24-29.



is accepting and applying the other forms of *tauheed*. Therefore, his deeds may then be accepted by Allah.[143] Allah says, "So whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and not associate anyone [with Allah] in the worship of his Lord" (18:110).

One of the acts that must be done solely towards Allah is prayer or supplication. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said, "Supplication is the [essence of] worship."[144] When a person prays or supplicates to another, he is showing his trust and reliance in that other. He is demonstrating his need for the one he is praying to. He is demonstrating his trust in that person or being's ability to know, understand and fulfill his need. This kind of feeling in the heart that is reflected in supplication must be directed towards Allah only. That is why the Prophet (peace be upon him) called supplication the essence of worship. Hence, anyone who prays or supplicates to anyone other than Allah is associating partners with Allah or, in other words, committing *shirk*. This is the antithesis of *Imaan* and *tauheed*.

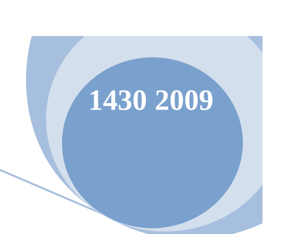
This type of *tauheed* is actually a necessary consequence or result of the correct belief in *tauheed al-ruboobiyah*. If one realizes that there is no *rabb* (Lord) except Allah, then one will realize that none is worthy or deserving of worship except Allah. If none other than Allah is worthy of worship, then why would anyone worship somebody or something other than Allah?

On this aspect of *tauheed*, ibn Abu al-Izz al-Hanafi wrote,

The Quran abounds with statements and parables concerning this type of *tawhid*. It first affirms the *tawhid al-ruboobiyah*, that there is no Creator other than Allah. This conviction necessitates that no one should be worshipped except Allah. It takes the first proposition [that Allah is lord] as evidence for the second proposition [that Allah is the only one worthy of worship]. The Arabs believed in the first proposition and disputed the second. Allah then made it clear to them: Since you know that there is no Creator except Allah, and that He is the One who can give a person what benefits him or keep away from him what harms him, and He has no partner in those acts,

[143] Cf., al-Hammad, *Tauheed al-Uloohiyah*, p. 18.

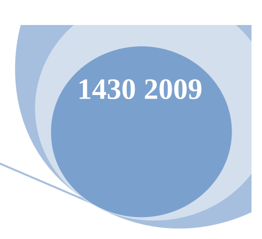
[144] Recorded by Abu Dawud, al-Nasaa'i, al-Tirmidhi and others. Graded *sahih* by al-Albani. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami al-Sagheer*, vol. 1, p. 641.



then how can you worship others besides Him and associate partners with Him in His Godhead? For example, Allah says in the Quran, "Say: Praise be to Allah and peace on His servants whom He has chosen [for His message]. Who is better: God or the false gods they associate with Him? Or who has created the heavens and the earth, and who sends you down rain from the sky with which He brings forth beautiful gardens? It is not in your power to cause the growth of the trees in them. Can there be another god besides Allah? Yet they are a people who assign equals [to Him]" (*al-Naml* 59-60). At the end of other similar verses, Allah states, "Can there be another god besides Allah?" (*al-Naml* 61, 62, 63 and 64). This is a question with a clearly implied negative answer. They accepted the notion that no one but Allah does such things. Allah used that as a proof against them. It does not mean to ask if there is another god besides Allah, as some have claimed. Such a meaning is inconsistent with the context of the verses and the fact that the people actually used to take other gods alongside Allah. As Allah says, "Can you possibly bear witness that besides Allah there is another god? Say: I witness it not" (*al-Anaam* 19). And they used to say [about the Prophet], "Does he make all the gods one? That it is truly a strange thing" (*Saad:* 5). But they would never say that there was another god [with Allah] that would "make the earth a fixed abode, place rivers in its fold, and place firm hills therein" (al-Naml 61). They accepted the fact that only Allah did all of those things. Therefore Allah says, "O people, adore your Guardian-Lord who created you and those who went before you that you may learn to be righteous" (al-Baqara 21) and "Say: Think, if Allah took away your hearing and your sight and sealed up your hearts, who, a god other than Allah, could restore them to you" (al-Anaam 46). And there are other similar verses.[145]

(3) *Tauheed al-Asma wa al-Sifaat*: The third aspect of *tauheed*, in this way of viewing *tauheed*, is recognizing and affirming the Oneness of Allah with respect to His names and attributes. One must affirm that these attributes are perfect and complete in Allah alone. These attributes are unique to Allah. No one else can attain any of these attributes.

[145] Ibn Abu al-Izz, vol. 1, pp. 37-38.



Throughout the history of Islam, this is another aspect of *tauheed* concerning which many sects deviated. Shuaib al-Arnaut describes the different views that developed in the following passage,

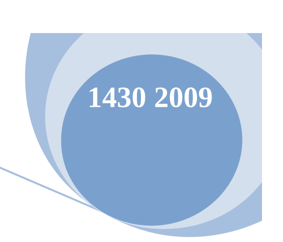
There is no doubt that the topic of Allah's attributes must be considered as one of the greatest and most important topics of the foundations of faith. The views of the Islamicists have differed on this issue. Some of them followed the approach of complete denial of the attributes. Others accepted Allah's names in general but denied the attributes. Some of them accepted both the names and attributes but, at the same time, rejected or gave interpretations for some of them, turning away from their apparent meanings [of the texts found in the Quran and Sunnah]. Some of them took the approach that it is obligatory to believe in all of the names and attributes that are mentioned in the Book of Allah and the authentic Sunnah. They took them and passed them on according to their plain, apparent meaning. They deny any understanding of their modality (*kaifiyah*) and deny any kind of similarity [of those attributes to any other than Allah]. The people of this last opinion are those who are called the *salaf* [pious predecessors] and *ahl al-Sunnah*.[146]

The correct belief concerning this topic that has been passed on from the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) and his Companions was aptly summarized by al-Saadi when he wrote,

As for belief in Allah, it includes: belief in whatever attributes Allah has described Himself with in His book and whatever attributes His Messenger (peace be upon him) has attributed to Him. [The belief in those attributes are] without any distortion or negation, and without stating how or what manner the attributes are. In fact, the belief is that there is nothing similar to Allah

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[146] Shuaib al-Arnaut, introduction to Zain al-Din al-Maqdisi, *Aqaweel al-Thiqaat fi Ta'weel al-Asma wa al-Sifaat wa al-Ayaat al-Muhkamaat wa al-Mushtabihaat* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risalah, 1985), p. 6. One of the earliest examples of a person asking about these attributes and seeking an explanation for them comes from the time of Malik. A man came to him and said, "O Abu Abdullah [Imam Malik], [about the verse,] 'The Most Gracious rose over the Throne,' how is this rising?" Malik's reply was, "The modality of His act is not known. But His rising over the Throne is not unknown. Belief in it is obligatory. Asking about it is an innovation. And I suspect that you are a heretic." This narration from Malik, with various wordings, can be found in numerous works. For a discussion of its chains and meanings, see Jamaal Baadi, *Al-Athaar al-Waarida an 'Aimmat al-Sunnah fi Abwaab al-Itiqaad* (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 1416 A.H.), vol. 1, pp. 226-231.



and, at the same time, He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing. Therefore, what He has attributed to Himself is not denied nor are such descriptions distorted from their proper meanings. In addition, the names of Allah are neither denied, nor is their manner described, nor are they depicted in a way that makes His attributes similar to the attributes of any of His creation. This is because there is no one and nothing similar or comparable to Him. He has no associate or partner. One cannot make an analogy between Him and His creation, glorified and most High be He.

With respect to belief in what Allah has been attributed with of attributes and names, there must be a combination of affirmation and negation. The *ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah* do not allow any straying from what the Messengers preached, as that is the Straight Path. Included in this very important principle are all the statements from the Quran and the Sunnah detailing Allah's names, attributes, actions and what should be negated of Him. Included among this is the belief in Allah's settling Himself over the Throne[147], His descending to the lowest heaven, the believers seeing Him in the Hereafter— as the confirmed, continuous reports have stated. Also included under this principle is that Allah is close and responds to the supplications. What is mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah concerning His closeness and "being with" the believers does not contradict what is stated concerning His transcendence and His being above the Creation. For, Glory be to Him, there is nothing at all similar to Him with respect to any of His characteristics.[148]

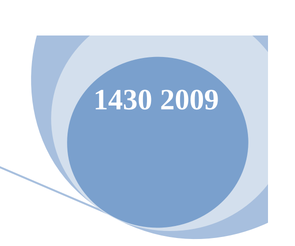
In one verse, Allah has pointed out that both nothing is similar to Him whatsoever and, at the same time, He has attributes, such as hearing and seeing. Allah has stated, "There is nothing similar to Him and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Seeing" (42:11). Hence, there is a complete denial of anthropomorphism while affirming Allah's attributes of hearing and seeing.[149]

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[147] As al-Baihaqi pointed out, this belief, which is clearly and plainly indicated in the Quran and Sunnah refutes the Jahmiyah view that Allah is everywhere and in everything. See Abu Bakr al-Baihaqi, *al-Itiqaad ala Madhhab al-Salaf Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Jamaah* (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Arabi, 1984), p. 55.

[148] Quoted from Abdullah al-Jarullah, *Bahjah al-Naadhireen fima Yuslih al-Dunya wa al-Deen* (1984), pp. 7-8.

[149] Ibn Taimiyyah (as well as his student ibn al-Qayyim) was a staunch opponent of anthropomorphism. His writings clearly state that Allah's attributes are unique to Him and are not the same as the attributes of humans. However, some people have actually accused him of anthropomor-



This aspect of *tauheed* is very important and should not be underestimated. As Ahmad Salaam points out, the people before the coming of the Prophet (peace be upon him) accepted the idea of Allah alone being the only Creator of the Universe. However, they associated partners with Allah in different forms of worship. Therefore, Islam came to purify this concept of Allah being the Lord or *Rabb* and gave it its proper understanding. By doing so, then they would worship Allah alone properly. But the way to achieve that, or the beginning point, is to have the knowledge and correct understanding of Allah's names and attributes. If one has knowledge of and a correct understanding of Allah's names and attributes, then one would never turn to anyone else or direct any form of worship to anyone other than Allah.

Hence, a correct and detailed understanding of Allah's names and attributes is truly the foundation for the correct fulfillment of the other types of *tauheed*.[150] He further states that *tauheed al-ruboobiyah* is like a tree. Its root, then, is *tauheed al-asma wa al-sifaat*. In other words, *tauheed al-ruboobiyah* stands on a foundation, which is *tauheed al-asma wa al-sifaat*. If that root or foundation is not found, the tree itself may be diseased and weak.[151]

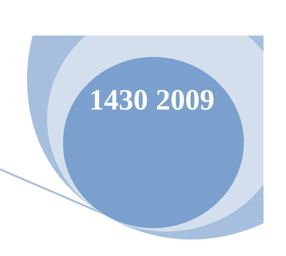
However, given that parable, the real fruit of *tauheed al-asma wa al-sifaat*, once again, is *tauheed al-uloohiyah*. The more that one knows about Allah and His attributes, the more one will love Allah, fear Allah and have hope in Allah. Definitely, the more one knows about Allah, the more one will love Allah and desire to please Allah and have Allah pleased with him. Hence, the correct understanding of the names and attributes of Allah is very important and very beneficial. Those people who stray on this issue have harmed themselves greatly and lost a great fortune.

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phism. These accusations are based on blatantly false reports concerning ibn Taimiyyah, extreme ignorance or a biased hatred for this scholar who opposed many heresies. For more on this point and a refutation of such accusations, see Salaah Ahmad, *Dawah Shaikh al-Islaam ibn Taimiya wa Atharuhaa ala al-Harakaat al-Islaamiyah al-Mu'asirah* (Kuwait: Dar ibn al-Atheer, 1996), vol. 2, pp. 375-388.

[150] Ahmad Salaam, *Muqaddimah fi Fiqh Usool al-Dawah* (Beirut: Dar ibn Hazm, 1990), p. 97.

[151] Salaam, p. 100.



(B) Belief in the Angels

The second article of faith mentioned by the Prophet (peace be upon him) was belief in the angels. Angels are a type of creation of Allah that is, in general, unseen by man. They have been created from light but they do have forms and bodies. They are servants of Allah and have no aspect of divinity to them whatsoever. They submit to His command completely and never stray from fulfilling His orders.

Salaam points out that if a person does not believe in angels, he then cannot believe in the coming of revelation to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This is because it was an angel, Gabriel, that brought the Quran to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Therefore, belief in the Quran cannot be confirmed unless one believes in the angels, as a class, and the Angel Gabriel, in particular, who brought that revelation to the Prophet (peace be upon him).[152]

According to ibn Uthaimeen, proper belief in the angels comprises four matters:[153]

First, one must believe in their existence.

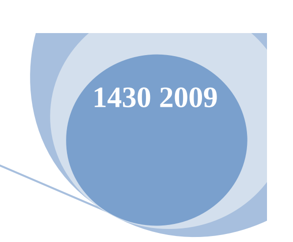
Second, one must believe in them in general but also one must believe in their names that have been explicitly stated in either the Quran or authentic Sunnah. For example, one of the angels is named *Jibreel* (Gabriel). He was the angel who brought the revelation to the Prophet (peace be upon him).

Third, one must believe in their attributes as stated in the Quran or Sunnah. For example, it is stated in a hadith that the Prophet (peace be upon him) saw the Angel Gabriel covering the horizon and he had six hundred wings. This shows that this species of creation is a truly great and marvelous creation of Allah. It is also demonstrated, such as in this hadith currently being discussed, that an angel can appear in different forms, such as in the form of a human. This also demonstrates Allah's great power and ability to do whatever He wills.

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[152] Salaam, p. 104.

[153] Cf., Ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan*, pp. 27-28. "Cf.," is used implying that the points are from ibn Uthaimeen but the discussion and explanation is not necessarily from his writing.



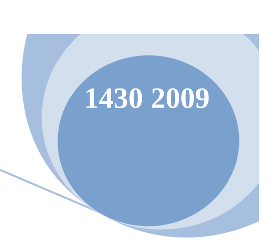
Fourth, one must believe in the actions that they perform as mentioned in the Quran or authentic hadith. It is stated in the Quran that they worship Allah and glorify Him. It is also indicated that specific angels have been given specific responsibilities. *Jibreel* is in charge of the "life of the heart" which is a reference to the revelation that has come from Allah. *Israafeel* is responsible for blowing the trumpet that will resurrect the bodies on the Day of Judgment. Hence, he is related to the reviving of life on the Day of Resurrection. *Mikaaeel* is responsible for the rain and vegetation. These are the "sources" of life on earth. Ibn Uthaimeen points out that it is perhaps the relationship between these three angels and their "life-giving" responsibilities that led the Prophet (peace be upon him) to open his late-night prayers with the following supplication, "O Allah, Lord of *Jibreel*, *Mikaaeel* and *Israafeel*, the Originator of the Heavens and the Earth, the Knower of the Unseen and Witnessed, You judge between Your slaves in that wherein they differ, guide me to the truth in the matters concerning which they have differed, by Your Leave. You guide whom You will to the Straight Path."[154]

A fifth matter that one must fulfill in his belief in the angels is to have a strong love for them due to their obedience and worship of Allah. Furthermore, they declare the Oneness of Allah and fulfill His commands. They also have strong love and loyalty for the true believers in Allah. They pray to Allah on behalf of the believers and ask Allah to forgive them. They support them in both this life and the Hereafter.

An important aspect related to belief in the angels is that everyone must believe that he has with him at all times two angels that are recording his deeds. The following verses are in reference to those angels: "[Remember] that the two receivers [recording angels] receive [him], one sitting on the right and one on the left. Not a word does he utter, but there is a watcher by him ready [to record it]" (50:17-18).

There are many beneficial results that flow from a proper belief in angels. For example, knowing about the angels allows one to recognize the greatness of Allah and His Power. This great creation known as angels is an indication of the greatness of their Creator. Additionally, one should thank

[154] Muhammad ibn Uthaimeen, *Majmuat Fatawa wa Rasaa'il Fadeelat al-Shaikh Muhammad ibn Salih al-Uthaimeen* (Riyadh: Dar al-Watan, 1413 A.H.), vol. 3, pp. 160-161.



Allah for His extreme care and concern for humans. He has created these creatures to support the believers, protect them, record their deeds and other aspects which are beneficial to the believers.

However, a believer's belief in the angels goes much beyond that. The believer knows that the angels are noble creatures who support and aid whatever is true and just. Therefore, whenever the believer decides to perform a good deed, stand up for the truth and sacrifice for what is right, he knows that there are creatures in this world who are going to support him and help him in his cause, like the angels supported and helped the believers in the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In fact, such is promised from Allah, as the following verses from *soorah ali-Imraan* indicate: "Allah had helped you at Badr, when you were a contemptible little force; then fear Allah. Thus may you show your gratitude. Remember when you said to the believers, 'Is it not enough for you that Allah should help you with three thousand angels (specially) sent down? Indeed, if ye remain firm, and act aright, even if the enemy should rush here on you in hot haste, your Lord would help you with five thousand angels making a terrific onslaught' (3:123-125).

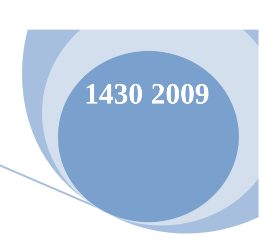
The angels even ask for the believer's forgiveness and pray on behalf of the believer. Allah says in the Quran, "He it is Who sends blessings on you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of darkness into light: and He is full of mercy to the believers" (33: 43).

(C) Belief in Allah's Books

Belief in Allah's books is the third article of faith mentioned in this hadith. It refers to the revelations that Allah sent down to His messengers as a mercy and guidance to lead mankind to success in this life and happiness in the Hereafter. In particular, the Quran is the final revelation. It is the uncreated speech of Allah.

Ibn Uthaimeen points out that the belief in Allah's books comprises four aspects:[155]

[155] Cf., Ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan*, pp. 32-33.



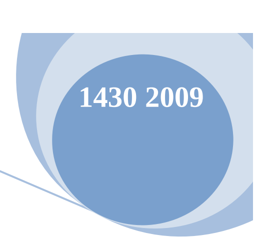
First, one must believe that those books were truly revealed from Allah.

Second, one must specifically believe in the books mentioned in the Quran and Sunnah. They are the Quran revealed to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), the *Taurah* revealed to the Prophet Moses (peace be upon him), the *Injeel* revealed to the Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) and the *Zaboor* revealed to the Prophet David (peace be upon him). There is also reference in the Quran to the "pages" of Abraham and Moses. The books that the Jews and Christians possess today, which they call the Torah, Gospel and Psalms, may contain some of those original revelations but there is no question that they have been distorted. Hence, to believe in the *Torah* of Moses, for example, does not mean that a Muslim believes in the first five books of the Old Testament. The two are different books although the latter may possess some of what was in the original *Taurah*.

Third, one must also believe in everything that Allah has revealed, whether it be in the Quran or in the previous books. That is, for example, if the Quran states something, then the Muslim must believe in it. He has no choice in this matter. If he rejects any statement in it, he has negated his beliefs in the Books of Allah. Allah says, "Then do you believe in a part of the Scripture and you reject the rest? Then what is the recompense of those who do so among you, except disgrace in the life of this world. And on the Day of Resurrection they shall be consigned to the most grievous torment. And Allah is not unaware of what you do" (2:85).

Fourth, one must act in accord with the unabrogated revelation, which is the Quran. One must be pleased with it and submit to it completely. This is so even if the person does not completely grasp the wisdom behind the command or statement.

All of the previous revelations of Allah have been abrogated by the final revelation, the Quran. There is no need for any Muslim to turn to the remnants of any of the earlier scriptures. Everything that he needs for his guidance is contained in the Quran and what it points to, such as the Sunnah of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Allah has stated in the Quran, "And to you We have revealed the Scripture in truth, confirming whatever Scripture that came before it, and a watcher and judge over it" (5:48). Commenting on



this verse, ibn Uthaimeen says, "It is a ruler over the previous scriptures. Hence, it is not allowed to act in accord with any ruling of the rulings from the previous scriptures unless it is verified and accepted by the Quran."[156]

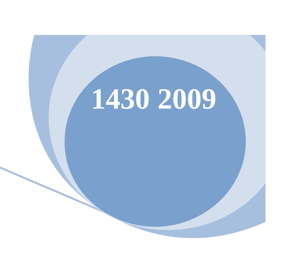
It is one of the greatest blessings of Allah that He sent revelations for mankind. These revelations guide man to the purpose for which he was created. This is one of the many aspects of this creation that helps a human being see and recognize the truth. Commenting on this point, Idris wrote,

> God created men so that they may serve Him. His being a servant of God constitutes the essence of man. Man cannot therefore attain to his true humanity and acquire peace of mind unless he realizes this aim for which he was created. But how can he do this? God, being merciful and just, has helped him in many ways. He granted him… an originally good nature that is inclined to know and serve its true Lord. He granted him a mind that possesses a moral sense and the ability to reason. He made the whole universe a natural book full of signs that lead a thinking person to God. But to make things more specific and to give him more detailed knowledge of his Lord, and to show him in a more detailed manner how to serve Him, God has been sending down verbal messages through His prophets chosen from among men, ever since the creation of man. Hence, the description of these messages in the Quran as guidance, light, signs, reminders, etc.[157]

In fact, not only did He send revelations for mankind but He also sent specific and different revelations according to the needs and circumstances of different people over time. This is another expression of Allah's great mercy for mankind. This process continued until the Quran was revealed, containing all the guidance that mankind needs from the time of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) until the Day of Judgment. Since it is meant to be a guidance for all times until the Day of Resurrection, as opposed to the earlier scriptures, Allah has protected the Quran from any tampering, mistakes or distortions. Allah has said, "Verily, it is We who have sent down the Reminder [the Quran] and surely We will guard it [from corruption]" (15:9).

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[156] Ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan*, pp. 32-33.
[157] Idris, pp. 18-19.



(D) Belief in the Messengers

The next article of faith is belief in Allah's Messengers. A messenger is any human who was chosen by Allah to receive revelation from Him and who was commanded to pass that revelation on. The first of the messengers was Noah (*Nooh*).[158] Every people was sent messengers and these messengers came with the same fundamental teaching:

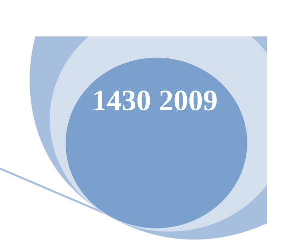
"And verily, We have sent among every nation a Messenger proclaiming, 'Worship Allah [alone] and avoid all false deities'" (16:36). The final messenger and prophet is the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). Allah has said, "Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the Messenger and the Seal of the Prophets" (33:40).

It is important to note that all of these messengers and prophets were simply human beings. They did not have any divine status or attribute.[159] They had no knowledge of the unseen except for that which Allah revealed to them. Their loftiest attribute is that of being a servant of Allah. Such is Allah's description of them in the Quran. Indeed, with respect to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), in reference to three of the greatest events in his life, Allah refers to him as His servant.[160]

Correct belief in the messengers comprises four aspects[161]:

First, one must believe that the message of all of them is the truth from Allah. If a person today denies any single one of them who is confirmed in the Quran or authentic hadith, then he is in fact denying all of them. Allah says about the people of Noah, "The people of Noah belied the messengers" (26:105). However, Noah was the first messenger. This implies that, in essence, if a person denies one messenger, he is in fact denying all of them since

[158] As for Adam, he was a prophet and not a messenger. Every messenger was a prophet but not vice-versa. For the differences between a prophet (*nabi*) and messenger (*rasool*), see the author's "Questions and Answers," *Al-Basheer* (Vol. 2, No. 1, May-June 1988), pp. 5-7.
[159] This is obviously one of the ways by which the Christians strayed. They raised their Prophet Jesus (peace be upon him) to a divine status while it is clear from their own book that he was simply a human being who prayed and beseeched God on a number of occasions.
[160] See 25:1, 17:1 and 72:19.
[161] Cf., ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan*, pp. 36-38.



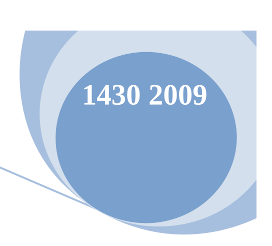
their message is essentially one and consistent. Hence, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "By the One in whose Hand is the soul of Muhammad, there will be no Jew or Christian of this nation[162] who hears of me and then dies without believing in that with which I have been sent except that he will be one of the inhabitants of the Hell-fire."[163]

This is one of the aspects that distinguishes Muslims from the earlier peoples. Muslims believe in all of the prophets. However, the others refused some— whether it be the Jews rejecting Jesus (peace be upon him) or the Jews and Christians rejecting the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him)— although, in reality, they had no grounds whatsoever to refuse the later prophet. Each messenger came with clear signs and evidence. Their rejection by the people could only be based on arrogance, ignorance or hostility to the truth.

Second, one must believe in all of the Messengers mentioned by name in the Quran or Sunnah. As for those not mentioned, one must believe in them at a general level[164], knowing that Allah has sent many messengers although not all of them are mentioned by name in the Quran or hadith. Allah has stated in the Quran, "And indeed We have sent messengers before you. Of them, some We have related to you their story and some We have not related to you their story" (40:78).

Third, one must believe in everything that they stated. They communicated their messages from Allah completely and properly. They exerted themselves to propagate Allah's message. They strove for the sake of Allah in the most complete manner. They were most knowledgeable of Allah and the best worshippers and servants of Allah.[165] The messengers "have been protected from attributing to Allah something of their own invention, judging according

[162] Meaning everyone from the time of the Prophet (peace be upon him) until the Day of Judgment. They are all the Prophet's Nation because they are all obliged to believe in him and follow him.
[163] Recorded by Muslim.
[164] At the same time, no one can claim that a person, for example, Buddha, was a prophet because there is no evidence from the Quran and Sunnah to affirm such a claim.
[165] Abdullah al-Muslih and Salaah al-Saawi, *Ma La Yasa' al-Muslim Jahluhu* (Islamic Foundation of America, 1995), p. 59.



to their own desires, falling into major sins, and adding to or diminishing from the religion."[166]

Fourth, one must submit to, accept and act in accord with the law of the messenger who has been sent for his guidance. Allah says in the Quran, "We sent no messenger but to be obeyed by Allah's leave" (4:64). With respect to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him), Allah says in the verse after the verse quoted above, "But no, by your Lord, they can have no faith until they make you judge in all disputes between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your decisions, and accept them with full submission" (4:65).

The believer should realize that the sending of messengers for the benefit and guidance of humankind is a great blessing from Allah. The knowledge that they conveyed is knowledge that is beyond the grasp of the human intellect by itself since it deals with matters of the unseen. Indeed, humankind is in more need of their guidance than they are in need of food and drink. If they are void of food and drink for any period of time, they will die, implying loss of this life. But if they are refusing Allah's guidance through the messengers, they will lose the everlasting bounties of the Hereafter.

(E) Belief in the Last Day and the Hereafter

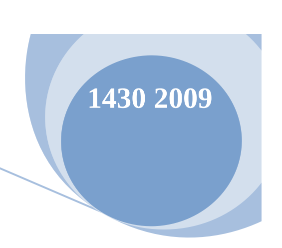
"The Last Day" is called such because there will be no new day after it, as the people of Paradise shall be in their abode as will the people of Hell. Among its other names are "The Day of Resurrection," "The Reality," "The Event," "The Day of Judgment," and "The Overwhelming." This is the greatest day that mankind shall pass through. Indeed, it will be the gravest and most fearful day. A person's new life will be decided on that day. It will mark a new beginning for each and every soul. This new step may lead to eternal bliss or eternal damnation.[167]

Belief in the Last Day implies belief in everything that the Quran or the Prophet (peace be upon him) has stated about the events of that Day and thereafter. There are some general aspects (resurrection, judgment and reward,

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[166] Abdur-Rahmaan Abdul-Khaliq, *The General Prescripts of Belief in the Quran and Sunnah* (The Majliss of al-Haqq Publication Society, 1986), p. 18.

[167] For Quranic/rational arguments for the existence of the Hereafter, see Idris, pp. 11-16.



Paradise and Hell) that every Muslim should be aware of and believe in with certainty. There are also more detailed aspects that the Quran or the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) mentioned. The more one has knowledge of that Day and its surrounding events, the greater the effect this belief will have on him. Hence, it is highly recommended for each individual Muslim to learn about the events that occur prior to and on the Day of Resurrection.

As recorded in *Sahih Muslim*, before the Day of Judgment and the destruction of this earth, Allah will send a wind softer than silk, coming from Yemen, that will take the souls of every individual who has even the slightest amount of faith in his heart. Therefore, the events of the end of the earth will only be lived through by the worst of people, those with no faith whatsoever.

One of the first events to occur is the sun rising from the West. At that time, all those people will declare their faith but it will be of no avail to them. Then the Horn shall be blown and all on this earth shall die. Allah says, "And the trumpet will be blown, and all who are in the heavens and all who are on the earth will swoon away, except him whom Allah wills" (39:68). This earth and heaven shall then be destroyed. After a period of forty— it is not known whether it is forty hours, days or years— a second Horn will be blown and the people will be resurrected: "And the Trumpet will be blown [the second blowing] and, behold, from the graves they will come out quickly to their Lord. They will say, 'Woe to us! Who has raised us up from our place of sleep?' [It will be said to them,] 'This is what the Most Beneficent [Allah] has promised, and the Messengers spoke the truth'" (36:51-52).

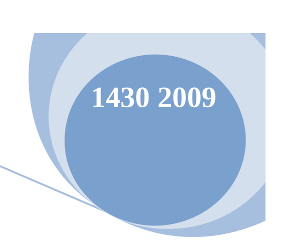
According to ibn Uthaimeen,[168] belief in the last day encompasses three aspects. First is belief in the Resurrection: after the Second Blowing of the Horn, the people will be resurrected in front of Allah. They shall be naked, barefoot and uncircumcised.[169] Allah says, "As We began the first creation, We shall repeat it. [It is] a promise binding on Us. Truly, We shall do it" (21:104).

The resurrection is going to be in the same body that the person had in this worldly life. Ibn Uthaimeen has pointed out the wisdom and importance of

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[168] Cf., Ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan*, pp. 40-41.

[169] As the Prophet (peace be upon him) stated in a hadith recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.



this: "If it were a new creation, it would mean that the body that performed the sins in this world would be safe from any punishment. To come with a new body and have that body punished goes against what is just. Hence, the texts and rational argument indicate that the [person] resurrected is not a new [creation] but a return [of the old creation]."[170] He also points out that Allah has the ability to recreate the bodies even after they have disintegrated. Humans may not be able to understand how exactly that is possible— like so many other aspects that humans cannot fathom— but Allah has stated it and a believer knows full well that it is true and well within Allah's ability to do so.

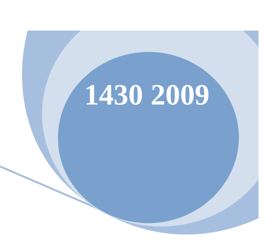
The second aspect is belief in the accounting or reckoning of the deeds and the reward/punishment for those deeds. This aspect is mentioned and stressed in numerous places in the Quran. Here are a couple of examples: "Verily, to Us will be their return. Then, verily, upon Us will be their reckoning" (88:25-26); "And We shall set up balances of justice on the Day of Resurrection, then none will be dealt with unjustly in anything. And if there be the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it. And sufficient are We as reckoners" (21:47).

Allah has made it clear that all deeds will be weighed on the Day of Judgment. Allah says, "And the weighing on that Day will be the true weighing. So as for those whose scale [of good deeds] will be heavy, they will be the successful. And as for those whose scale will be light, those are they who will lose their ownselves because they denied and rejected Our Signs" (7:8-9).

One should always recall that the reward Allah gives to His servants is an act of His mercy as He rewards them more than what their deeds entail. However, Allah's punishment is out of His justice and He does not punish anyone more than what he deserves.

The third essential aspect of belief in the Last Day is belief in Heaven and Hell. Heaven is the eternal abode or reward for the believers. Hell is the eternal abode of punishment for the disbelievers. The stronger opinion is that they both are in existence at this present time and they both shall exist forever. They are not simply states of mind as some non-Muslims and a few heretical

[170] Ibn Uthaimeen, *Majmu*, vol. 3, p. 174.



Muslims believe. Allah and His Messenger made mention of them and have described them clearly and in unequivocal terms. There is absolutely no room for any Muslim to deny their existence or their descriptions.

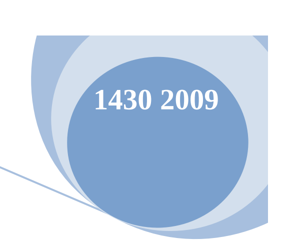
About Heaven, for example, Allah has said,

"Verily, those who believe and do righteous deeds, they are the best of creatures. Their reward with their Lord is gardens of eternity, underneath which rivers flow, they will abide therein forever. Allah being well-pleased with them and they with Him. That is for him who fears his Lord" (98:7-8); "No person knows what joy is kept hidden for him as a reward for what they used to do" (32:17).

Concerning Hell, for example, Allah has said, "Verily, We have prepared for the wrongdoers a Fire whose walls will be surrounding them. And if they ask for relief, they will be granted water like boiling oil that will scald their faces. Terrible the drink and evil a resting place" (18:29); "Verily, Allah has cursed the disbelievers and has prepared for them a flaming Fire. They will abide therein forever and they will find neither a protector or a helper. On the Day when their faces would be turned and rolled in all sides of the Fire, they will say, 'Oh, would that we had obeyed Allah and obeyed the Messenger'" (33:64-66).

Ibn Taimiyyah points out that belief in the Last Day also includes belief in everything that shall occur to a person after his death and before the Day of Resurrection.[171] This includes the trial in the grave and the pleasure or punishment in the grave. The trial in the grave is mentioned in an authentic hadith recorded by al-Tirmidhi. It states that two angels, al-Munkar and al-Nakeer, come to the person and ask him: What did you use to say about this man [meaning the Prophet (peace be upon him)]? Other narrations mention two angels coming and asking three questions: Who is your Lord? What is your religion? Who is your prophet?[172]

[171] Quoted in ibn Uthaimeen, *Majmu*, vol. 3, p. 169.
[172] For the texts of these hadith, see al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami al-Sagheer*, vol. 1, p. 186 and vol. 1, p. 344.



There are additional detailed aspects related to the Hereafter that a believer should learn about and believe in. Due to space limitations, they cannot be discussed in detail here.[173] These matters include: (1) The Fount or Cistern of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him)[174]; (2) The different intercessions[175]; (3) The distribution of the books of deeds; (4) Passing over the *siraat* (bridge) over Hell[176]; and (5) The entrance into Paradise and Hell with all of its related aspects.

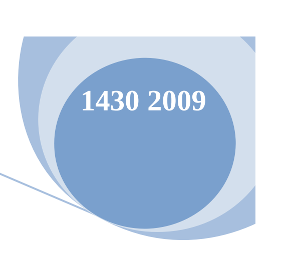
The belief in and knowledge of the great events of the Last Day and the Hereafter should have some very profound effects on the individual— if he takes the time to remember and seriously think about that Day.

First, it should make the believer rush to perform good deeds, knowing the reward that may be in store for them. The bounties of Paradise are greater than what any eye has seen or even what any mind could imagine. First and foremost, this great reward includes the pleasure of Allah and the opportunity to see Him in the Hereafter. If a person could possibly be conscious of this aspect at every moment of his life, he would be anxiously seeking and searching for any good deed he could perform.

Second, the threat of punishment should sway the person from committing any sin, no matter how "light". No sin performed in this world could be worth the punishment it could bring about in the Hereafter. Furthermore, by committing sins, the person may also be earning the displeasure of Allah, his Lord, Creator and Beloved.

Third, according to ibn Uthaimeen, the reckoning and justice of the Day of Judgment should bring comfort and solace to the heart of the believer. It is normal for humans to have a hatred for injustice. In this world, it appears to occur often. Those who cheat and who are unethical many times get ahead in this world without ever suffering for what they have done. However, that is

[173] Although not used as a reference here due to its detail, Salaam (pp. 120-145) has provided an excellent yet concise discussion of many of the aspects of the Hereafter.
[174] For a discussion in English on this topic, see Abu Muhammad al-Hasan al-Barbahaaree, *Explanation of the Creed* (Birmingham, UK: Al-Haneef Publications, 1995), p. 36.
[175] See al-Barbahaaree, p. 37.
[176] See al-Barbahaaree, p. 38.



only because, on a grand scale, this world is not the final place for judgment, reward and punishment. They will not escape the evil that they are doing. The good deeds of a person will also not be in vain, as they sometimes seem to be in this world. The time will come for all those matters to be settled and to be settled in a just manner. And that time is the Day of Judgment.[177]

(F) The Belief in Divine Decree

The next and final article of faith mentioned by the Prophet (peace be upon him) is belief in "divine decree" or *al-Qadar*. Idris discusses the meaning of this word and states,

> The original meaning of the word *Qadar* is specified measure or amount, whether of quantities or qualities. It has many other usages which branch out from this core. Thus *yuqad-dir* means, among other things, to measure or decide the quantity, quality, position, etc., of something before you actually make it. And it is this latter sense which interests us here.[178]

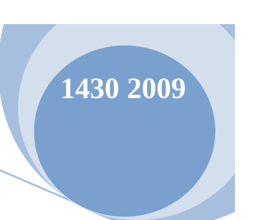
It is obligatory upon every Muslim to believe in the concept of *Qadar* or Divine Decree, as it is clearly referred to in numerous authentic hadith.

Ibn al-Qayyim shows that there are four "levels" or aspects of belief in *Qadar*. If one does not believe in these four aspects, he does not have the correct or proper belief in Allah.[179]

The first level is belief in Allah's knowledge of everything, both of universals and particulars, before its existence. This is related to both, what is sometimes referred to as, the actions of Allah, such as producing rain, giving life and so forth, as well as the actions of human beings. Allah has foreknowledge of all of the deeds of the creation according to His ever-existing knowledge that He is described as having eternally. This includes His knowledge of all their affairs with respect to obedience, disobedience, sustenance and life-spans.

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[177] Ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan*, p. 46.
[178] Idris, p. 24.
[179] See Muhammad ibn al-Qayyim, *Shifa al-Aleel fi Masa`il al-Qada wa al-Qadar wa al-Hikma wa al-Ta'leel* (Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d.), pp. 29-65.

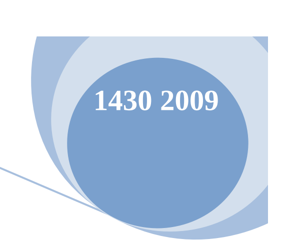


This aspect can be concluded from many Quranic verses, including: "And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. None knows them but He. And He knows whatever there is on the earth and in the sea; not a leaf falls, but he knows it. There is not a grain in the darkness of the earth nor anything fresh or dry, but is written in a Clear Record" (6:59).

The second level of belief in *Qadar* is belief in Allah's recording of all things before He created the heavens and the earth. Hence, Allah not only knew and knows what will happen, but Allah has also recorded this information in the Preserved Table (*al-Lauh al-Mahfoodh*). Such an act is not difficult for Allah whatsoever. Allah says, "Don't you know that Allah knows all that is in heaven and on earth? Verily, it is all in the Book. Verily, that is easy for Allah" (22:70). Allah also says, "No calamity occurs on the earth or among yourselves but it is inscribed in the Book [of Decrees] before We bring it into existence. Verily, that is easy for Allah" (57:22).

The third level is to believe in Allah's decreeing of everything that is in existence, and if He does not will something, it can never come into existence. Once again, this also refers to all things. It refers to Allah's actions of giving life, sustenance and so forth; and it also includes all of the acts performed by human beings. Nothing can be done unless Allah decrees it and allows it to occur. A person may intend or try, for example, to shoot and kill another person but such can only occur if Allah decrees it. The person may take all the necessary steps but if Allah does not will it to occur, it will not occur. In the case just mentioned, Allah may will the gun to jam or the shooter's hand to flinch and miss his target and so forth.

This aspect of *Qadar* may also be concluded from numerous pieces of evidence. For example, Allah says, "If Allah had willed, succeeding generations would not have fought against each other, after clear verses of Allah had come to them. But they differed, some of them believing and others disbelieving. If Allah had willed, they would not have fought against one another, but Allah does what He likes" (2:253). Allah also says, "Verily, this [the Quran] is no less than a Reminder to (all) the 'Alamin (mankind and jinn).To whomsoever among you who wills to walk straight. And you cannot will unless (it be) that Allah wills — the Lord of the 'Alamin (mankind, jinn and all that exists)" (81:27-29).



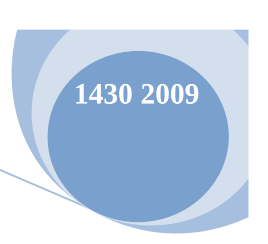
Ibn Uthaimeen also offers a rational argument for this aspect of belief in *Qadar*. He says that it must be accepted that Allah is the Owner, Master and Controller of this creation. Hence, it cannot be the case, as long as everything is under His Control and part of His Dominion, that something occurs in His Dominion that He does not want to happen. Therefore, everything that occurs in His creation is by His Will. Nothing could ever occur unless He willed it. Otherwise, His control and mastery over His dominion would be deficient and lacking, as things would be occurring in His dominion that either He did not will to occur or they occurred without His knowledge. These hypotheses are unacceptable.[180]

The fourth level of belief in *Qadar* is the belief in Allah's creating of everything, bringing of everything into existence and making everything be. This aspect is also demonstrated by numerous verses in the Quran, including: "Blessed be He who sent down the Criterion to His slave [Muhammad] that he may be a warner to the Worlds. He to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth, and who has begotten no offspring and for whom there is no partner in the dominion. He has created everything, and has measured it exactly according to its due measurements" (25:1-2). Also, "Allah has created everything" (39:62). Another verse states, "Verily, We created all things with Divine Pre-ordainment" (54:49).

Ibn Uthaimeen has explained this point by saying,

Everything is a creation of Allah. Even the deeds of mankind are creations of Allah. Although they are by [man's] free choice and will, they are creations of Allah. This is because every act of a human is the result of two aspects: a definitive will [to do the act] and the complete ability [to do the act]. For example, suppose that in front of you is a stone weighing twenty pounds. I say to you, "Lift this stone," and you say, "I don't want to lift it." In this case, your lack of will has prevented you from lifting the stone. If I said a second time to you, "Lift that stone," and you said, "Yes, I will listen and do what you have said." In this case, if you wanted to lift it but you were not capable of lifting it, you would not have lifted it because you did not have the capability to do so. If

[180] Ibn Uthaimeen, *Majmuat*, vol. 3, p. 195.



I said to you a third time, “Lift that stone,” and you complied and lifted it above your head, that was because you had the ability and the will to do it.

All of our deeds that we perform[181], therefore, are the result of a definitive will and complete ability. The one who created that ability and will is Allah. If Allah had made you paralyzed, you would not have the ability. If you turned your attention to some other deed, you would not have done it...

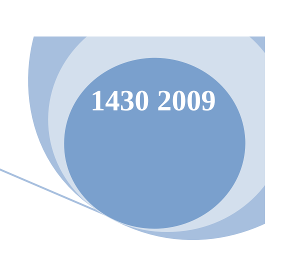
Therefore, we say: All of the actions of humans are created by Allah. This is because they are the result of definitive will and complete ability. The one who created that will and ability is Allah. The way in which Allah is the creator of that will and capability is that the will and ability are two characteristics of the one who wants something and the one who has ability but the one who created that person with that ability was Allah. The One who created the person who has specific characteristics is also the one who created those characteristics. This makes the matter clear and shows that the actions of human beings are the creation of Allah.[182]

Actually, there are a number of questions and misconceptions that have arisen surrounding the concept of *Qadar*. Due to space limitations, they cannot be dealt with in detail here. However, in a not-too-lengthy passage, Jaafar Sheikh Idris has adequately dealt with a number of such issues. He wrote,

God decided to create man as a free agent, but He knows (and how can He not know?) before creating every man how he is going to use his free will; what, for example, his reaction would be when a Prophet clarifies God’s message to him... “But if we are free to use our will,” a Qadari[183] might say, “we may use it in ways that contradict God’s will, and in that case we would not be right in claiming that everything is willed or decreed by God.” The Quran answers this question by reminding us that it was God who willed that we shall be willful, and it is He who allows us to use our will. [He then quotes *surah al-Insaan* 29-30.] “If so,” says a Qadari, “He could have prevented us from doing evil.” Yes, indeed he could, “Had God willed, He would have brought them all

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[181] This should probably say, “All of our voluntary deeds...” because there are some deeds that humans perform involuntarily and without a definitive will.
[182] Ibn Uthaimeen, *Majmuat*, vol. 3, pp. 196-197.
[183] A Qadari is one who denies the concept of *al-Qadar* altogether.

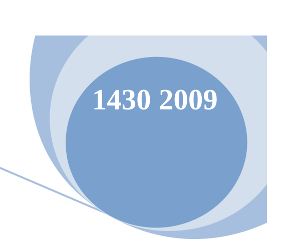


together to the guidance" (6:35) And Allah says "if thy Lord had willed whoever is in the earth would have believed, all of them, all together" [10:99]... But He had willed that men shall be free especially in regard to matters of belief and disbelief. "Say: 'The truth is from your Lord; so let whosoever will believe, and let whosoever will disbelieve" [18:29]...

"If our actions are willed by God," someone might say, "then they are in fact His actions." This objection is based on a confusion. God wills what we will in the sense of granting us the will to choose and enabling us to execute that will, i.e., He creates all that makes it possible for us to do it. He does not will it in the sense of doing it, otherwise it would be quite in order to say, when we drink or eat or sleep for instance, that God performed these actions. God creates them, He does not do or perform them. Another objection, based on another confusion, is that if God allows us to do evil, then He approves of it and likes it. But to will something in the sense of allowing a person to do it is one thing; and to approve of his action and commend it is quite another...[184]

In the Hadith of the Angel Gabriel, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explicitly stated that one must believe in divine decree, "[both] the good and the evil thereof." Ibn al-Qayyim points out that what is meant by "evil" is with respect to the human beings and not with respect to Allah. The "evil" is the result of the human's act of ignorance, wrong, oppression and sin. However, it was allowed and brought into being by Allah. But no evil is to be attributed to Allah because, with respect to Allah, the act is good and full of wisdom, as it must be a result of Allah's knowledge and wisdom. Any act of that nature must, in its essence, be good and cannot be pure evil. This is supported by the Prophet's hadith, "Evil is not to be attributed to You."[185] That is because every act that occurs is the result of some wisdom and goodness and can never be pure evil. The individual himself may think it otherwise, but in reality there is wisdom and good in everything that occurs in Allah's creation.[186]

[184] Idris, pp. 25-27.
[185] Recorded by Muslim.
[186] See Abdul Aziz al-Rasheed, *al-Tanbeehaat al-Sanniyah ala al-Aqeeda al-Waasitiyah* (Dar al-Rasheed li-l-Nashr wa al-Tauzee'), p. 263.



Ibn Uthaimeen gives an example illustrating this point. Allah says in the Quran, "Evil has appeared on land and sea because of what the hands of men have earned, that Allah may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return [by repenting]" (30:41). In this verse, Allah states the evil (*fasaad*) that has appeared, the cause for it and its result. The evil (*fasaad*) and the cause of it are both evil (*sharr*). However, the goal of it is good: that Allah may make them taste a part of that which they have done, in order that they may return [by repenting]. Hence, there is a wisdom and a goal behind that *fasaad*. This goal and wisdom makes the entire action something good and not a pure evil.[187]

Pure evil, on the other hand, would be one in which there was no benefit or positive result related to it. Allah's wisdom and knowledge preclude the existence of acts of that nature.[188]

The Fruits of Proper Belief in Divine Decree[189]

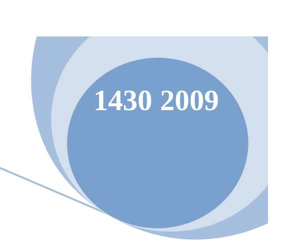
(1) When a person realizes that all things are under the control and decree of Allah, he is freeing his belief from any form of *shirk* or associating partners with Allah in His Lordship. There is truly only One Creator and Master of this creation. Nothing occurs except by His will and permission. When this is firmly in the heart of the person, he then also realizes that there is none worthy of praying to, seeking assistance from, relying upon, and so forth, except that one Lord. Hence, he directs all of his acts of worship toward that One who has decreed and determined all matters. Thus, both *tauheed al-ruboobiyah* and *tauheed al-uloohiyah* are correctly and completely fulfilled with the proper belief in *al-Qadar*.

(2) A person will put one's reliance upon Allah. A person should follow the outward "causes and effects" that one sees in this world. However, he must realize that those "causes and effects" will not bring about any ends un-

[187] Muhammad ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh al-Aqeedah al-Waasitiyah* (al-Damaam, Saudi Arabia: Dar ibn al-Jauzi, 1415 A.H.), vol. 1, pp. 191-192. Also see, in the same work, vol. 1, pp. 70-72.

[188] Even the creation of Satan is not a pure evil. See Umar al-Ashqar, "The Wisdom behind the Creation of Satan," *al-Basheer* (Vol. 2, No. 3, Sept.-Oct. 1988), pp. 13-22.

[189] In his work on *al-Qadar*, al-Hammad (pp. 31-44) mentions twenty-five benefits or fruits of the belief in *al-Qadar*. Here, just a few examples shall be given from a number of different sources.



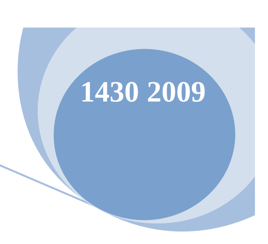
less Allah so wills them to do so. Hence, a believer never puts his complete trust and reliance upon his own actions or the worldly aspects that he might have some control over. Instead, he follows whatever causes he may know of which lead to a desired end and then he puts his trust in Allah to bring about that desired end.[190]

(3) Ibn Uthaimeen argues that with proper belief in *al-Qadar*, one does not become arrogant and boastful. If he achieves any goal that he desired, he knows that such goal only came about because Allah, in His mercy, had decreed it for him. If Allah had so wished, He could have put many obstacles in his way and prevented him from reaching his goal. Therefore, instead of becoming full of himself and arrogant upon reaching his goal, the person who truly believes in *al-Qadar* becomes very thankful to Allah for bringing about that blessing.[191]

(4) The proper belief in *al-Qadar* brings about tranquility and peace of mind. The person realizes that everything that occurs is according to Allah's Divine Decree. Furthermore, there is a wisdom behind everything Allah does. Hence, if the person loses a beloved or something of this world, he does not go insane, despair or give up hope. Instead, he realizes that such was the will of Allah that he must accept. He must also realize that such has occurred for a purpose. It did not occur haphazardly or accidentally, without any reason behind it. Allah has said, "No calamity befalls on the earth or in yourselves but it is inscribed in the Book [of Decrees] before We bring it into existence. Verily, that is easy for Allah. In order that you may not be sad over matters that you fail to achieve, nor rejoice because of that which has been given to you. And Allah likes not prideful boasters" (57:22-23).[192]

(5) Belief in *al-Qadar* gives a person strength and courage. He knows that Allah has recorded his life and his sustenance for him. Such comes only from Allah and is already decreed. Hence, he need not fear struggling and fighting for the sake of Allah as the time of his death is already recorded. He need not fear anyone when it comes to his sustenance and provision as such come only from Allah and have been already recorded for him. No human can cut off his

[190] Cf., ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan*, p. 58.
[191] Cf., ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan*, p. 58.
[192] Cf., ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Usool al-Imaan*, p. 58.



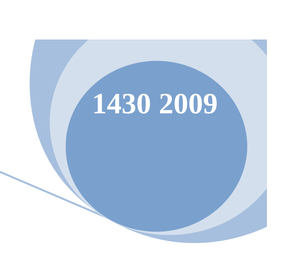
sustenance and livelihood if Allah has decreed that he shall continue to receive provisions and sustenance from some source.[193]

Conclusions

This chapter has provided a brief synopsis of the basic beliefs of a Muslim. Every Muslim must know what he is supposed to be believe in, at least at an elementary level. However, as his knowledge of the articles of faith increases, his faith itself will become stronger and greater.

For more details about the articles of faith, the author would like to recommend Umar al-Ashqar's eight part series that touch upon the various aspects of faith, such as belief in Allah, the angels and so forth. These books are published by the International Islamic Publishing House in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia and are easily available via the internet. The books of Bilal Philips and Muhammad Jibaly on aspects of belief are also well worth reading for the new Muslim.

[193] Cf., Salaam, p. 173.



The Ritual Acts of Worship of a Muslim

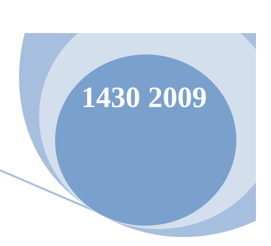
The Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Islam is built upon five [pillars]: testifying that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, establishing the prayers, giving the Zakat, making the pilgrimage to the House and fasting the month of Ramadaan."[194] Here, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) has given a parable in which he gives a picture of Islam like that of a house. The foundations or pillars of the house are five.

These actions are what are known as the "five pillars of Islam." The first pillar, the declaration of the testimony of faith, was discussed earlier. Hence, this chapter is devoted to a discussion of the other four pillars. Before discussing each pillar separately, a couple of introductory points need to be made.

First, all of these ritual acts have both an outward or physical aspect and an inward or spiritual aspect to them. The scholars have emphasized that before any act of worship is acceptable to Allah, it must meet two conditions: (1) The act must be proper and correct according to Allah's guidance and (2) the act must be done solely and purely for the sake of Allah. Allah states, for example, "So whoever hopes for the meeting with his Lord, let him work righteousness and associate none as a partner in the worship of His lord" (18:110). Commenting on this verse, ibn al-Qayyim wrote,

This is in reference to the only type of deed that Allah will accept. The deed must be in accordance with the Sunnah of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and done solely for the Countenance of Allah. A doer cannot possibly fulfill both of these conditions unless he has knowledge. If he does not know what has been narrated from the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him), then he cannot intend that. If he is not knowledgeable of whom he worships, he cannot intend Him alone in his deeds. If it were not for knowledge, his deed could not be acceptable. It is knowledge that guides to sincerity and

[194] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.



purity and it is knowledge that indicates what is the actual following of the way of the Prophet (peace be upon him).[195]

Allah asks of His servants purity in their hearts. Although this purity is reflected in the deeds itself, it is the purity that is the key to Allah being pleased with a certain deed. Allah created death and life in order to test humankind to see who are the best in deeds. He did not create humankind and test them to see who performs the most deeds with the least quality. Allah has stated, "Blessed is He in whose Hand is the dominion, and He is the One who Decrees all things, Who has created death and life, that He may test you which of you is the best in deed. He is the All-Mighty, the Oft-Forgiving" (67:1-2).

Commenting on this verse, al-Fudail ibn Iyaad stated that "best in deeds," means the most pure and most correct. He stated, "If a deed is sincere and pure but not correct, it is not accepted. If it is correct but not pure, it is not accepted. [It will not be accepted] until it is both pure and correct. It is pure if it is solely for the sake of Allah and it is correct if it is according to the Sunnah."[196]

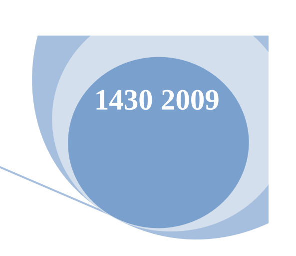
Second, these ritual acts are indeed acts of worship in themselves yet, at the same time, they should have a lasting influence on the individual. The Muslim, for example, should not complete the prayer and not have that prayer have any effect on his behavior and actions. In the hadith quoted earlier, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated that Islam is built upon these ritual pillars. That means that they form a foundation—a foundation that support an entire life based on the concept of submission to Allah alone.[197]

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[195] Quoted from Ali al-Saalihi, *Al-Dhau al-Muneer ala al-Tafseer*, (Riyadh: Mu'assasat al-Noor, n.d.), vol. 4, p. 173.

[196] Quoted in Abdul Rahman ibn Rajab, *Jaami al-Uloom wa al-Hikam* (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risaalah, 1991), vol. 1, p. 72,

[197] For more on the spiritual benefits of each of the pillars of Islam, see the author's *Purification of the Soul*.



Establishing the Prayers

The Meaning of “Establishing the Prayers”

A very important aspect that one should note about this pillar is that what is being referred to is not simply the “performance” of prayer. In the Quran also, Allah is not ordering simply the performance of prayer.

Instead, Allah is requiring from the believers *iqaamat al-salat* (“the establishment of the prayers”). Hence, this pillar of Islam is not simply praying but it is something special, which Allah and His Prophet (peace be upon him) called, “establishing the prayer.” Only if one performs the prayer properly and correctly does one fulfill this pillar. This points out that the number of people who pray are many while the number that establish the prayer are few. This is like the statement narrated from Umar about the *Hajj*, “The number who performed the Hajj are few while the riders [present at the *Hajj*] are many.”[198]

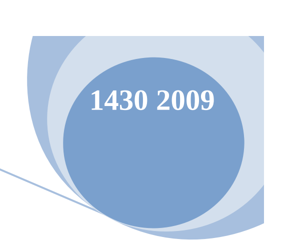
Al-Dausiri also pointed out one difference between the two phrases of “establishing the prayer” and “performing the prayer.” He said, “[Allah] did not say ‘performers of prayer’ but He said, ‘those who establish the prayer.’ Allah distinguished between them in order to distinguish between the true and real prayer and the prayer in form only. The true prayer is the prayer of the heart and soul, the prayer of humility, the prayer of those who stand silently and in fear in front of Allah.”[199] The prayer “in form only” was never the goal of the command.

Definitely part of the establishing of the prayer is the establishment of the spiritual and inward aspects of the prayer, as al-Dausiri has alluded to. But that is certainly not the only difference between the two as can be seen in the definition or statements about “establishing the prayer” as given by many of the scholars of Islam. For example, the famous commentator on the Quran, ibn Jarir al-Tabari wrote, “Establishing it means to perform it within its proper limits, with its obligatory aspects, with what has been made obligatory con-

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[198] Cf., Al-Raaghib al-Isfahaani, *Mu’jam Mufradaat Alfaadh al-Quran* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, n.d.), p. 433.

[199] Abdul Rahman al-Dausiri, *Safwat al-Athaar wa al-Mafaheem min Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem* (Kuwait: Dar al-Arqam, 1981), vol. 2, p. 8.



cerning it by the one upon whom it has been made obligatory." Then he quoted the Companion ibn Abbas as saying, "Establishing the prayer is to perform its bowing, prostrations and reciting in a complete manner as well as having fear of Allah and complete attention to it."[200] The early scholar Qatada also stated, "The establishing of the prayer is to stick to and guard its timing, ablution, bowing and prostration."[201]

In general, one can say that the "establishing of the prayer" means that one performs and executes the prayer in the proper manner as prescribed in the Quran and Sunnah. This includes both the outward as well as the inward aspects of the prayer. Neither of the two are sufficient in themselves to truly establish the prayer. One must be in a state of purity for the prayer. One must perform the prayer in its proper time. One should, in the case of men, perform the prayer in congregation in a mosque if feasible. One must perform the prayer according to its rules and regulations, at the same time, though, the physical acts must be accompanied with diligence, submission, humbleness, calmness and so on. One must perform all of the acts of the prayer properly and in the manner demonstrated by the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him). These are all part of establishing the prayer. These are essential aspects of this very important foundation of the entire structure of Islam.

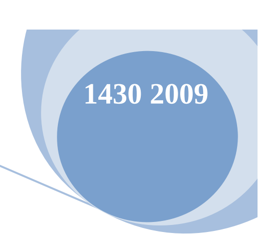
From all of the above it is clear that what Allah is referring to is not something light or something that can be taken lightly. It is to fulfill the prayers in the best way that one can do so, according to the Sunnah of the Prophet (peace be upon him), with the correct intention and with the proper attention on the prayer.

However, it may be that the person establishes the prayer to some extent. The person has, from a legal point of view, performed his prayer but the reward from Allah for that prayer may be lacking. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) has said, "A person may finish from [the prayer] and all that is rec-

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[200] Muhammad ibn Jareer al-Tabari, *Jami al-Bayaan an Ta'weel Ayi al-Quran* (Beirut: Dar al-Fikr, 1988), vol. 1, p. 104.

[201] Quoted in Ismail ibn Katheer, *Tafseer al-Quran al-Adheem* (Kuwait: Dar al-Arqam, 1985), vol. 1, p. 168.



orded for him of his prayer is one-tenth of it, one-ninth, one-eighth, one-seventh, one-sixth, one-fifth, one-fourth, one-third or one-half."[202]

The meaning of "establishment of the prayer" has been stressed here because that is what the pillar of Islam is. This pillar is not simply the performance of the prayer. It is not performing it in any way or with just physical motions. Nor is it simply praying in the heart without any physical parts to it whatsoever. Nor is it praying the prayer at the time one finds convenient. One must be careful to perform this pillar of Islam in the best and correct manner. On this point, Nadwi wrote,

> *Salat* [prayer] is not merely the name of certain physical movements. It is not a wooden, lifeless ritual or something of a military discipline in which one's choice or volition has no place. It is an act in which all the three aspects of human existence, physical, mental and spiritual, find their due expression. The body, the mind and the heart participate in it jointly and in an ideal manner. The acts of standing erect, kneeling and prostration appertain to the body, recitation appertains to the tongue, reflection and contemplation to the mind, and fear, repentance and lamentation to the heart.[203]

The importance of the prayer in Islam cannot be overstated. It is the first pillar of Islam that the Prophet (peace be upon him) mentioned after mentioning the testimony of faith, by which one becomes a Muslim. It was made obligatory upon all the prophets and for all peoples.

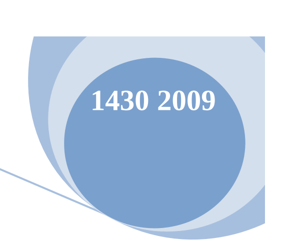
Once a man asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the most virtuous deed. The Prophet (peace be upon him) stated that the most virtuous deed is the prayer. The man asked again and again. The first three times, the Prophet (peace be upon him) again answered, "The prayer," then on the fourth occasion he stated, "Jihad in the way of Allah."[204]

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[202] Recorded by Abu Dawud and Ahmad. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami*, vol. 1, p. 335.

[203] Abul Hasan Ali Nadwi, *The Four Pillars of Islam* (Lucknow, India: Academy of Islamic Research and Publications, 1976), pp. 22-23.

[204] This is from a hadith recorded by Ahmad and ibn Hibban. According to al-Albani, the hadith is *hasan*. Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Sahih al-Targheeb wa al-Tarheeb* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1982), vol. 1, p. 150.



The importance of the prayer is demonstrated in many of the Prophet's statements. For example, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "The first matter that the slave will be brought to account for on the Day of Judgment is the prayer. If it is sound, then the rest of his deeds will be sound. And if it is bad, then the rest of his deeds will be bad."[205]

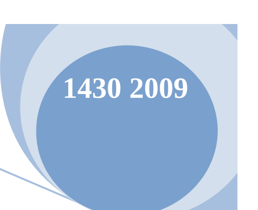
The importance of the prayers lies in the fact that no matter what actions one performs in his life, the most important aspect is one's relationship to Allah, that is, one's faith (*imaan*), God-consciousness (*taqwa*), sincerity (*ikhlaas*) and worship of Allah (*'ibaadah*). This relationship with Allah is both demonstrated and put into practice, as well as improved and increased, by the prayer. Therefore, if the prayers are sound and proper, the rest of the deeds will be sound and proper; and if the prayers are not sound and proper, then the rest of the deeds will not be sound and proper, as the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself stated.

In reality, if the prayer is performed properly— with true remembrance of Allah and turning to Him for forgiveness— it will have a lasting effect on the person. After he finishes the prayer, his heart will be filled with the remembrance of Allah. He will be fearful as well as hopeful of Allah. After that experience, he will not want to move from that lofty position to one wherein he disobeys Allah. Allah has mentioned this aspect of the prayer when He has said, "Verily, the prayer keeps one from the great sins and evil deeds" (29:45). Nadwi has described this effect in the following eloquent way,

Its aim is to generate within the subliminal self of man such spiritual power, light of faith and awareness of God as can enable him to strive successfully against all kinds of evils and temptations and remain steadfast at times of trial and adversity and protect himself against the weaknesses of the flesh and the mischief of immoderate appetites.[206]

As for the Hereafter, Allah's forgiveness and pleasure is closely related to the prayers. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "Allah has obligated five prayers. Whoever excellently performs their ablutions, prays them

[205] Recorded by al-Tabaraani. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami*, vol. 1, p. 503.
[206] Nadwi, p. 24.



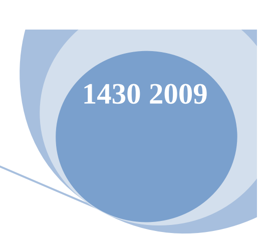
in their proper times, completes their bows, prostrations and *khushu'*[207] has a promise from Allah that He will forgive him. And whoever does not do that has no promise from Allah. He may either forgive him or He may punish him."[208]

The prayers are a type of purification for a human being. He turns and meets with his Lord five times a day. As alluded to above, this repeated standing in front of Allah should keep the person from performing sins during the day. Furthermore, it should also be a time of remorse and repentance, such that he earnestly asks Allah for forgiveness for those sins that he committed. In addition, the prayer in itself is a good deed that wipes away some of the evil deeds that he performed. These points can be noted in the following hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him): "If a person had a stream outside his door and he bathed in it five times a day, do you think he would have any filth left on him?" The people said, "No filth would remain on him whatsoever." The Prophet (peace be upon him) then said, "That is like the five daily prayers: Allah wipes away the sins by them."[209]

In another hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "The five daily prayers and the Friday Prayer until the Friday Prayer are expiation for what is between them."[210]

The essential importance of the prayer with respect to a Muslim's faith can be seen in the statement of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), "Between a man and polytheism (*al-shirk*) and disbelief (*al-kufr*) is the abandoning of the prayer."[211] In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) used the definitive *al-shirk* and *al-kufr*, which is a reference to something known and understood. This is understood to refer to the *kufr* that takes one out of the fold of Islam. Furthermore, both the words *shirk* and *kufr* have been

[207] *Khushu'* in the prayer is where the person's heart is attuned to the prayer. This feeling in the heart is then reflected on the body. The person remains still and calm. His gaze is also lowered. Even his voice is affected by this feeling in the heart. For more details on this concept (as well as the difference between it and *khudu'*), see Muhammad al-Shaayi, *Al-Furooq al-Laughawiyyah wa Atharuhaa fi Tafseer al-Quran al-Kareem* (Riyadh: Maktabah al-Ubaikaan, 1993), pp. 249-254.
[208] Recorded by Malik, Ahmad, Abu Dawud, al-Nasaa'i and others. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami*, vol. 1, p. 616.
[209] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[210] Recorded by Muslim.
[211] Recorded by Muslim.



used, and this is another sign that the act must take one out of the fold of Islam.

Siddiqi's words showing the importance of prayer are a good summary to this whole discussion. He wrote,

Prayer is the soul of religion. Where there is no prayer, there can be no purification of the soul. The non-praying man is rightly considered to be a soulless man. Take prayer out of the world, and it is all over with religion because it is with prayer that man has the consciousness of God and selfless love for humanity and inner sense of piety. Prayer is, therefore, the first, the highest, and the most solemn phenomenon and manifestation of religion.[212]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) stated its place in Islam when he said, "The head of the matter is Islam. Its pillar is prayer. And its apex is Jihad."[213]

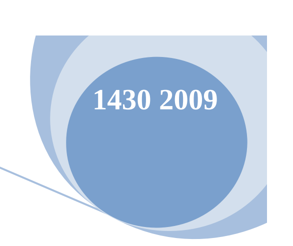
Some Important Points Concerning the Laws of Prayer

This is not the proper place to give a detailed discussion of the laws concerning the prayers. However, a few points shall be made.

The five daily prayers are obligatory upon every adult[214], sane Muslim. However, women who are experiencing their menses or post-partum bleeding are not to perform the prayers, as they are not in a state of ritual purity (described below). Furthermore, such women do not make up those prayers at a later time.

Before commencing with the ritual prayer, one must also be in a state of physical purity. Allah says, "O you who believe! When you intend to offer the prayer, wash your faces and your arms up to the elbows, rub (by passing wet hands over) your heads, and (wash) your feet up to the ankles" (5:6). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "The prayer is not accepted without purification."[215] Thus, for example, if one is "sexually defiled," either through sexual activity or a wet dream, of if a woman has just

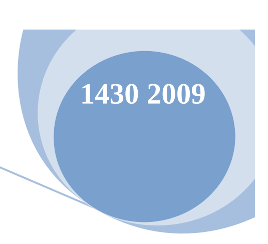
[212] Abdul Hameed Siddiqi, trans., *Sahih Muslim*, (Beirut: Dar al-Arabia, n.d.), vol. 1, p. 206.
[213] An authentic hadith recorded by Ahmad, al-Tirmidhi and others.
[214] Meaning: past the age of puberty.
[215] Recorded by Muslim.



completed her menses or post-partum bleeding, a complete washing, known as *ghusl*, must be made before commencing the prayer. Otherwise, one must be in a state of purity via ablution or *wudoo*, which involves washing the face, head, arms and feet. The ablution is to be repeated before the next prayer if one has relieved oneself, passed gas, had a deep sleep or lost consciousness. This prerequisite for the prayer further emphasizes the fact that worship of God involves all of one's being. However, outside of the ritual prayer, if one simply wants to supplicate to Allah, then ablution is not required.

In addition to being in a state of purity, one's clothing and place of prayer must also be free of impurities. In other words, the clothing and area should be free of urine, feces, blood and any other impure substance. Hence, the entire atmosphere and the feeling of the individual should be one of purity as he begins to enter into this noble state of prayers and communication directly with his Lord.

It is important to realize that the times of the daily prayers are fixed. Allah says, "Verily, the prayers are enjoined on the believers at stated times" (4:103). These timings are delineated in the following hadith: "The Angel Gabriel came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said, 'Stand and pray.' He prayed the Noon Prayer when the sun had passed its zenith. Then he came in the afternoon and said, 'Stand and pray.' Then he prayed the Afternoon Prayer when every object and its shadow had become the same length. Then he came at sunset and said, 'Stand and pray.' He prayed when the sun had disappeared. Then he came in the night and said, 'Stand and pray.' He prayed when the twilight had disappeared. Then he came at dawn and said, 'Stand and pray.' He prayed when the dawn had lit up—or he said became brightened. Then he came on the next day for the Noon prayer and said, 'Stand and pray.' He prayed the Noon Prayer when an object and its shade were the same length. Then he came for the Afternoon Prayer and said, 'Stand and pray.' He prayed the Afternoon Prayer when the shadow of an object was twice the object's length. Then he came for the Sunset Prayer, and it has only one time. Then he came for the Night Prayer and it was when half or one third of the night had passed and he prayed the Night Prayer. Then he came in the dawn when it was very light and said, 'Stand and pray,' and he prayed the Dawn Prayer. Then he said, 'The timings [for the prayers] are be-



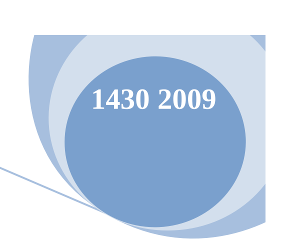
tween these two,' [that is, between the two sets of times in which he prayed with him]."[216]

Unfortunately, sometimes some Muslims find themselves busy during the day and therefore delay all of their prayers until nighttime, when they combine the Noon, Afternoon, Sunset and Night Prayers together at home. Converts in particular may find that the prayers are difficult with their work schedule and, at the same time, they may not have the confidence to pray in front of others or to ask for space at work to pray and so forth. This practice of delaying the prayers is incompatible with Islamic Law. The prayers must be said at their proper times and the individual should not take this matter lightly. He should exert himself for the sake of Allah and discover some way by which he will be able to perform the prayers during their proper times. At the very most, if he does need to combine some prayers, he may combine the Noon and Afternoon Prayers during the time of either the Noon or Afternoon Prayers.

Similarly, he may also combine the Sunset and Night Prayers at the time of either the Sunset or Night Prayers. However, no other combination is permissible. Furthermore, the individual should resist combining the prayers as a matter of being lackadaisical and, again, should strive to perform each prayer in its proper time.

Thus, in order for the prayer to be sound and proper, the following conditions must be met: (1) One must have knowledge that the time of the prayer has begun; (2) the individual must be in a state of purity; (3) the clothing, body and place of prayer must also be free of impurities; (4) the private parts must be covered in a proper fashion—for the man, the area between the navel and the knees must be covered with clothing that does not reveal what is supposed to be covered and the man should wear a garment that covers at least one shoulder; for the woman, all of her except her face and hands is to be covered in the prayer; (5) the individual must face the *qiblah*, or the direction towards Allah's Sacred Kaabah in Makkah; (6) the individual must have the proper intention for prayer.

[216] This hadith is sahih. See al-Albaani, *Irwaa* #250. Recorded by Ahmad, al-Nasaa`ee and al-Tirmidhi.



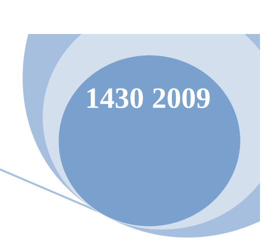
It is especially important for the individual to perform the five daily prayers in a congregation in a mosque. Numerous texts of the Quran and Sunnah indicate the importance of prayer in congregation. For example, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "The prayer of a person in congregation is twenty-five levels better than the prayer of a person prayed in his house or in the market. This is because when one of you performs ablution in an excellent manner and then goes to the mosque desiring only the prayer, he will not walk a step except that he will be raised a rank and a sin will be expiated. While he prays, the Angels invoke prayers upon him for as long as he remains seated in his place of worship, saying, 'O Allah have mercy on him, O Allah forgive him, O Allah turn towards him.' And you are continually considered in the prayer as long as you are waiting for the prayer."[217] Actually, many scholars state that performing the five daily prayers in a congregation is obligatory upon men. In addition to the obvious importance of congregational prayers in general, this author believes, based on his own experience, that it is extremely important for new converts to attend the prayers in congregation as much as possible.

First, it demonstrates the convert's seriousness in Islam; it shows that he is zealous about performing the most basic act of his new faith. This will immediately send a good sign to the Muslims in his community and they will be more willing to invest their time in such an individual.

Second, it is a good opportunity for the convert to befriend Muslims and learn from their example. It is very difficult to try to change one's life to an Islamic life while remaining within one's circle of non-Muslim friends. Hence, attending the mosque will open the door for the convert to make new Muslim friends.

Third, it is an important opportunity for the convert to learn about Islam. In the mosques, usually, one will find people who have knowledge of Islam. The new convert will not have to feel lost and on his own but will find devout Muslim who will be able to guide him and assist him. Obviously, these advantages apply equally to the male as well as the female convert. Hence, the fe-

[217] Recorded by al-Bukhari, Muslim and Abu Dawood.



male convert should also take advantage of this opportunity and try to perform some of her congregational prayers in the mosque as well.

The Quran, of course, is in Arabic.[218] The first chapter of the Quran is known as *soorah al-Faatihah*. This chapter forms an essential portion of the prayer and is read in every unit of the prayer. Obviously, it takes time for an individual to learn how to read this short chapter and to be able to memorize it. Until he is able to memorize this chapter, he applies the principle found in the following hadith: A man came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and told him that he was not able to learn anything of the Quran and requested that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) teach him some words that would suffice him. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught him to say, "*Subhaanallah. Wa-l-hamdulillaah. Wa laa ilaahah illa-llah. Wallahu akbar. Wa la haula wa la quwwata illa-billaah al-Alee al-Adheem*."[219] The individual said, "Those are [words of praise] for Allah. What can I say for myself?" The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told him to say, *"Allahumma, irhamni. Wa-rzuqni. Wa-'afini. Wa-hdini."*[220] When the man stood and left, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "He has filled his hand with goodness."[221]

This author would also advise the convert to learn Arabic expressions and passages of the Quran directly from people who speak Arabic properly. The convert should not rely upon transliterations, as such transliterations cannot convey the true manner of pronouncing the words if the individual is ignorant of the Arabic language in the first place. This author knows from his own personal experience that if the convert learns the phrases of the prayer or portions of the Quran incorrectly, it becomes all the more difficult for him to correct himself later. Thus, from the beginning, one should learn the pronunciation of the Arabic in the best manner possible directly from those who speak it correctly.

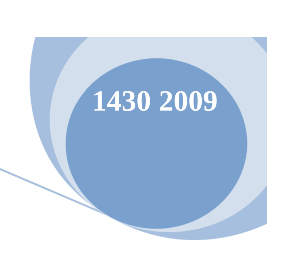
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[218] A "translation" of the Quran is not considered the Quran. The Quran is only the Arabic text.

[219] These phrases mean, respectively, "Exalted and perfect is Allah. All praise and thanks be to Allah. There is none worthy of worship except Allah. Allah is the greatest. There is no power or might except in Allah, the Exalted, the Great."

[220] These phrases mean, respectively, "O Allah, have mercy of me, provide for me, pardon me and guide me."

[221] Recorded by Abu Dawood and others. According to al-Albaani, it is *hasan*.



A Brief Description of the Prayer [222]

When the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would stand for prayer, he would face the direction of the Kaabah in Makkah, with the intention of performing the prayer.

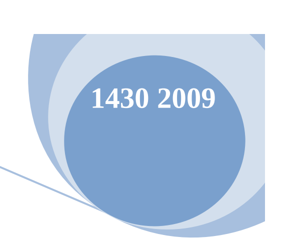
Then he would begin his prayer by saying, "Allahu akbar" ("Allah is greatest") and would raise his hands with this saying. Then he would put his right hand over his left above his chest. He would put his sight towards the ground. He would begin the prayer by reciting various supplications, praising and extolling Allah therein. Then he would seek refuge in Allah from the accursed Satan. Then he would recite, "In the name of Allah, the One Full of Mercy, the Ever Merciful," but he would not recite this aloud. Then he would recite *soorah al-Faatihah*, the first chapter of the Quran, reciting each verse separately. When he reached the end of *soorah al-Faatihah*, he would say amen. He would say that aloud and lengthen its pronunciation. Then he would recite another portion of the Quran after finishing reading *soorah al-Faatihah*, sometimes making a lengthy reading while others times a short one.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would recite the Quran audibly in the Morning Prayer, the first two units (*rakah*s) of both the Sunset and the Night Prayers. He would recite it silently in the Noon and the Afternoon Prayers as well as in the last two units of the Sunset and Night Prayers. He would also recite it audibly in the Friday Prayer, the two Eid Prayers, the Prayer for Rain and the Eclipse Prayers.

He would make the last two *rakah*s about half as short as the first two, the length of about fifteen verses or sometimes he would only recite *soorah al-Faatihah* in them.

When he would finish the entire reciting, he would pause a little, raise his hands, say the *takbeer* ("Allah is great") and then bow. He would put his hands on his knees and separate his fingers. Sometimes he would put his hands on his knees as if he were grasping them. He would keep his arms away

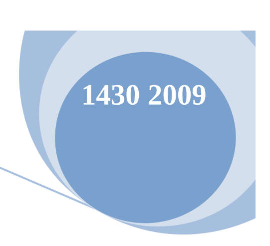
[222] From Abdul Adheem ibn Badawi, *The Concise Presentation of the Fiqh of the Sunnah and the Noble Book* (Riyadh: International Islamic Publishing House, forthcoming).



from his side and would stretch out his back and keep it straight, such that if one were to pour water on his back it would settle there.

He would be very calm and still in his bow. He used to say, "*Subhanna Rabbiyal-Adheem* (Exalted and perfect is my Lord, the Great)," three times. Also while bowing, he would state a number of words of remembrance and supplications, sometimes one and sometimes another. He also prohibited the reciting of the Quran while bowing or prostrating.

Then he would raise his back from the bowing position and saying, "*Sami-Allaahu liman hamidah* (Allah has heard him who praises Him)." He would also raise his hands while moving to stand straight. While standing, he would say, "*Rabbanaa wa lakal-hamd* (Our Lord and to you is the praise)." Sometimes he would say more than simply that. Then he would say the *takbeer* and go down to prostrate. He would put his hands on the ground before his knees. He would lean on his hands and spread them out. He would bring his fingers together and direct them towards the qiblah. He would place them parallel to his shoulders or, sometimes, parallel to his ears. He would firmly place his nose and forehead on the ground. He used to say, "I have been ordered to prostrate on seven bones: the forehead—and he pointed to his nose [as well]—, the two hands, the two knees and the ends [toes] of the two feet." He also said, "There is no prayer for the one whose nose does not touch the ground in the manner that the forehead does." He would remain calm and still in the prostration. He would say, "*Subhanna Rabbiyal-Adheem* (Exalted and perfect is my Lord, the Great)," three times. He would also recite a number of words of remembrance and supplications in this position, varying the different supplications that he would make. He stated that one should exert himself in making numerous supplications in this position. Then he would raise his head while pronouncing the *takbeer*. Then he would spread out his left leg and sit on it, resting his bones and being still. His right leg would remain erect on the foot, with the toes pointing toward the *qiblah*. At this juncture, he would say, "O Allah, forgive me, have mercy on me, strengthen me, raise me [in rank], guide me, pardon me and provide for me." Then he would state the *takbeer* and make a second prostration like the first one. Then he would raise his head while making the *takbeer* and sit straight on his left leg, until all his bones returned to the sitting position, and then he would get up, pushing up off the



ground. In the second *rakah* he would do the same that he did in the first but he would make this *rakah* shorter than the previous one.

At the end of the second *rakah*, he would sit for the saying of the *tashahhud*. If it were a two-*rakah* prayer, he would sit on his left leg like he did so in between the two prostrations. He would sit similarly in the first *tashahhud* of the three- and four-*rakah* prayers. While sitting for the *tashahhud*, he would put his right hand on his right thigh and his left hand on his left thigh. He would spread out his left hand and make a fist with his right, pointing with his right index finger and fixing his gaze upon it.

He would recite after each two *rakah*s, the *tahiyyat*[223] and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would also state the prayers upon himself[224] in the first *tashahhud* as well as later, and he established that for his Nation as well. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) used to make various different types of supplications during his prayer.

Then he would make the salutations to his right, saying, "Peace be upon you and the mercy of Allah," and to his left as well. Occasionally, during the first greeting he would add, "and His blessings" at the end of the phrase.

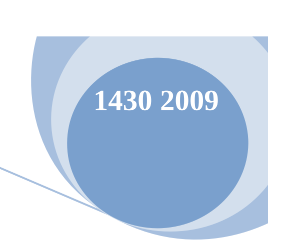
The Giving of the Zakat

Linguistically, the root of the word Zakat implies purification, blessing and growth. Allah has stated in the Quran, "Indeed whosoever purifies himself (*tazakkaa*) shall achieve success" (87:14). Another word used in the Quran and hadith for the Zakat is *sadaqa*. This word is derived from *sidq* (the truth). Siddiqi explains the significance of these two terms as they are used here,

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[223] This is the portion beginning with *al-tahiyyaatu li-laah*. Its translation is: "All compliments, prayers and pure words are due Allah. Peace be upon you, O Prophet, and the mercy of Allah and His blessings. Peace be upon us and upon the righteous servants of Allah. I bear witness that none is worthy of worship except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is His servant and messenger."

[224] This portion can be translated as: O Allah send prayers upon Muhammad and on the family of Muhammad as you sent prayers upon the family of Abraham, for You are Worthy of Praise, Full of Glory. O Allah, pour blessings upon Muhammad and upon the family of Muhammad as you poured blessings upon the family of Abraham, for You are Worthy of Praise, Full of Glory.



Both these words are highly meaningful. The spending of wealth for the sake of Allah purifies the heart of man of the love of material wealth. The man who spends it offers that as a humble gift before the Lord and thus affirms the truth that nothing is dearer to him in life than the love of Allah and that he is fully prepared to sacrifice everything for His sake.[225]

In Islamic Law, its technical meaning is in reference to a specific portion of one's varied wealth that one must give yearly to a specific group of recipients.

There is no question that among the pillars of Islam, Zakat ranks very close to that of prayer. They are often mentioned together in the Quran— in eighty two instances to be exact. One can also see from the Quran, that one of the keys to receiving Allah's mercy in the Hereafter is the payment of Zakat. In *surah al-Tauba*, verse 71, Allah states, "The believers, men and women, are helpers and supporters of one another, they enjoin what is right and forbid what is evil, they offer their prayers perfectly, they give the Zakat and they obey Allah and His Messenger. Allah will bestow His mercy on them. Surely, Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise." (9:71)

The payment of Zakat should purify a person. It also purifies his wealth. Allah said to the Prophet (peace be upon him), "Take (O Muhammad) alms from their wealth in order to purify them and sanctify them with it" (9:103). Beyond that, it can purify a believer's soul by cleansing him of the diseases of stinginess and miserliness.

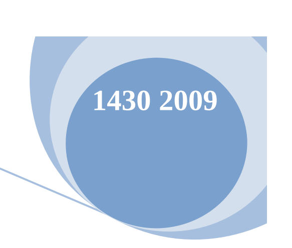
It also purifies the wealth of the person by removing any evil effect from it. The Prophet (peace be upon him) once said, "Whoever pays the Zakat on his wealth will have its evil removed from him."[226]

Zakat also has a very important role to play for society as a whole. There are some obvious factors that may be stated here. For example, Zakat helps the poor of society as they receive wealth that they need. This should also help to strengthen the ties of brotherhood within a Muslim society, as the poor

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[225] Siddiqi, vol. 2, p. 465.

[226] Recorded by ibn Khuzaima and al-Tabaraani. According to al-Albani, it is *hasan*. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Targheeb wa al-Tarheeb*, vol. 1, p. 312.



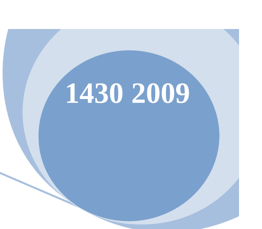
know that the rich will come to their aid through Zakat and other means of charity. Even for those who are not very rich, it makes them realize that they can afford to give for the sake of Allah. They may realize that they will not starve or die if they give some of their wealth for the sake of Allah. Furthermore, it can make those who possess wealth realize that such wealth has actually come as a blessing from Allah. Hence, the person must use it in the way that is pleasing to Allah. One of the most pleasing aspects is to fulfill one's responsibility of paying Zakat upon such wealth.

Muslims who do not pay their Zakat are not only harming themselves but they can actually harm the entire Muslim Nation. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "A people do not keep from giving the Zakat on their wealth except that they will be kept from having rain falling from the sky. If it were not for the animals, it would not rain at all."[227]

Allah and His prophet have made it clear that not paying Zakat is an act that is displeasing to Allah. Indeed, Allah has threatened a great punishment for such behavior. For example, the following verse of the Quran is a reference to those who do not pay the Zakat on their wealth: "And let not those who covetously withhold of that which Allah has bestowed on them of His Bounty (wealth) think that it is good for them. Nay, it will be worse for them. The things which they covetously withheld shall be tied to their necks like a collar on the Day of Resurrection. And to Allah belongs the heritage of the heavens and the earth, and Allah is Well-Acquainted with all that you do" (3:180).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) described the punishment that will come to those who do not pay the proper Zakat on their wealth. In one hadith in *Sahih al-Bukhari*, Abu Hurairah narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "[On the Day of Resurrection] camels will come to their owner in the best state of health they have ever had (in the world), and if he had not paid their Zakat on them, they would tread him with their feet; similarly, sheep will come to their owner in the best state of health they ever had in this world and, if he had not paid their Zakat, would tread him with their hooves and would butt him with their horns... I do not want anyone of you to come to me on the Day of Resurrection carrying over his neck a sheep that will be bleating. Then

[227] Recorded by ibn Majah. According to al-Albani it is authentic. See Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Silsilat al-Ahadeeth al-Saheeha* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islami, 1979), vol. 1, hadith no. 106,



he says, 'O Muhammad (please intercede for me).' I will say, 'I can't help you for I conveyed Allah's message to you.' Similarly, I do not want anyone of you to come to me carrying over his neck a camel that will be grunting. Such a person will say, 'O Muhammad (intercede for me).' I will say to him, 'I cannot help you for I conveyed Allah's Message to you.'"

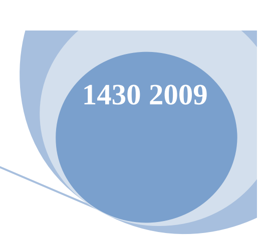
The Prophet (peace be upon him) warned of the consequences of not paying such Zakat. Note the following hadith from *Sahih al-Bukhari*: "Whoever is made wealthy by Allah and does not pay Zakat on his wealth, then on Day of Resurrection his wealth will be made like a bald-headed poisonous snake with two poisonous glands. It will encircle his neck and bite his cheeks and say, 'I am your wealth, I am your treasure.'" After stating that, the Prophet (peace be upon him) then recited the above verse from *surah ali-Imran*.

In another verse that also includes those who do not pay Zakat, Allah has said, "[There are] those who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah– announce unto them a painful torment. On the Day when that wealth will be heated in the fire of hell and it will brand their foreheads, flanks and backs. [It will be said to them], 'This is the treasure which you hoarded for yourselves. Now taste of what you used to hoard'" (9:34-35).

The Amount of Money to be Given as Zakat

Zakat is obligatory upon different forms of wealth, such as money, crops, fruits, livestock and treasures found in the earth. In today's world, the most common form of wealth is that of money. Zakat is to be paid on one's money if that amount of money reaches the minimum required for Zakat and if it has been in the person's possession for a year's time. The amount to be paid on such holding is 2.5%.

The minimum required holding of wealth before one is obligated to pay Zakat is known as the *nisaab*. There is actually a distinct *nisaab* for gold and for silver. Today, people hold cash and currency rather than gold or silver. This has led to some difference of opinion as to whether the *nisaab* for cash should be based on its gold equivalent or its silver equivalent. If gold is taken as the basis, Zakat is only obligatory if the amount of gold one possesses reaches twenty



mithqaals[228] or if a person holds its equivalent value in currency. If the Muslim possesses this amount of money for a year's time, he pays 2.5% once in that year as Zakat.

Zakat is distributed to specific categories of people. Allah has mentioned those categories in the following verse: "The alms are only for the poor, the needy, those employed to collect (the funds), and to attract the hearts of those who have been inclined (towards Islam); and to free the captives; and for those in debt; and for Allah's Cause, and for the wayfarer (a traveler who is cut off from everything); a duty imposed by Allah. And Allah is All-Knower, All-Wise" (9:60).

In general, most mosques have committees and accounts for Zakat. If a Muslim gives them his Zakat payment, informing them that it is Zakat, it should then be distributed to the proper recipients and the Muslim would have fulfilled his responsibility to Allah.

The Fast of the Month of Ramadaan

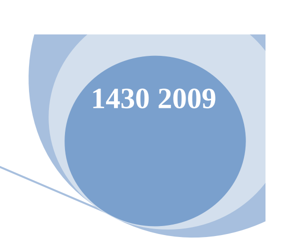
The fast of Ramadaan refers to abstaining from food, drink and sexual intercourse during the days of the month of Ramadaan.

Fasting is a source of self-restraint, piety and God-consciousness. It was prescribed by Allah for the prophets before Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). In the verses obligating the fast of the month of Ramadaan, Allah has pointed out its goal or purpose: "O believers! Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may attain *taqwa* [self-restraint, piety and God-consciousness]" (2:183).

The Prophet (peace be upon him) said that fasting is a protection from the Hell-fire: "Fasting is a shield from the Hell-fire like one of your shields used in fighting."[229] Furthermore, it will also come as an intercessor on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet (peace be upon him) has said, "The fast and the Quran

[228] Contemporary estimates range from 85 to 93.6 grams.

[229] Recorded by Ahmad, al-Nasaa'i and others. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami*, vol. 2, p. 720.



shall come as intercessors on the Day of Resurrection. The fast shall say, 'O Lord, I prevented him from his food and drink during the day, so let me intercede for him.' The Quran will say, 'I kept him from sleep during the night, so let me intercede for him.' Then they will be allowed to intercede."[230]

It is an act that demonstrates one's sincerity to Allah. Only Allah is aware if a person truly fasted or not. No one can know if he secretly broke his fast. Therefore, Allah has a special reward for those who fast. This is stated in the following report: Allah has said, "He leaves his food, drink and desires because of Me. Fasting is for My sake and I shall reward it. And every good deed shall be rewarded ten-fold."[231]

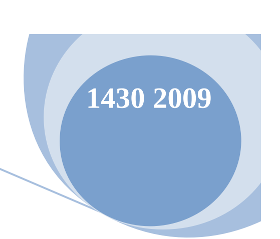
By Allah's grace and mercy, if a person fasts the month of Ramadaan with faith in Allah and hoping for its reward, Allah will forgive all of his previous minor sins. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever fasts the month of Ramadan with faith and hoping for its reward shall have all of his previous sins forgiven for him."[232]

Ibn al-Qayim noted some of the beneficial and important aspects of fasting when he wrote,

The purpose of fasting is that the spirit of man was released from the clutches of desires and moderation prevailed in his carnal self, and, through it, he realized the goal of purification and everlasting felicity. It is aimed at curtailing the intensity of desire and lust by means of hunger and thirst, at inducing man to realize how many were there in the world like him who had to go even without a small quantity of food, at making it difficult for the Devil to deceive him, and at restraining his organs from turning towards things in which there was the loss of both worlds. Fasting, thus, is the bridle of the God-fearing, the shield of the crusaders and the discipline of the virtuous.[233]

There is also a hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him) that warns of the punishment for one who breaks his fast improperly. In this hadith, the

[230] Recorded by Ahmad. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami*, vol. 2, p. 720.
[231] Recorded by al-Bukhari.
[232] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[233] Quoted in Nadwi, *Four Pillars*, p. 173.



Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "While I was sleeping, two men came to me and took hold of my arms. They brought me to a steep mountain and said, 'Climb.' I said, 'I am not able to.' They said, 'We will make it easy for you.' So I climbed until I came to the summit of the mountain where I heard terrible cries. I said, 'What are these cries?' They said, 'Those are the cries of the inhabitants of the Fire.' Then they took me further until I came to a people who were strung up by their hamstrings, and their jawbones were torn and flowing with blood. I said, 'Who are these people?' He said, 'Those are the people who break their fast before the time it was permissible to do so.'"[234]

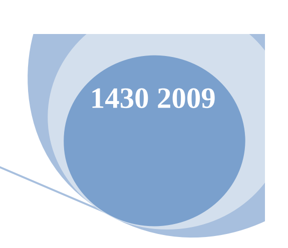
Fasting is obligatory upon every sane, adult, healthy, non-traveling Muslim. In addition, women must also be pure of menses and post-partum bleeding. If a person is traveling or ill, he is not required to fast. If he does fast, that fast will fulfill the requirements of the fast. However, if he does not fast, he must make up those missed days of fasting later. If a woman has her menses or post-partum bleeding, she is not allowed to fast and will make up those days later. The essential components of the fast are only two.

First, the person must have the intention of fasting for the sake of Allah. If a person simply goes without eating or fasts for the sake of losing weight, such would not be an act of worship of Allah. Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "There is no fast for the one who does not make the intention to fast before *Fajr* (dawn)."[235]

Second, the Muslim must refrain from anything that breaks the fast from the dawn of dawn until sunset. The matters that invalidate the fast are the following six:

(1 and 2) Intentionally eating or drinking: However, if a person forgetfully eats or drinks, then he does not have to make up the fast nor is there any expiation in his case. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

[234] Recorded by ibn Hibban and ibn Khuzaima. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Targheeb wa al-Tarheeb*, vol. 1, p. 420.
[235] Recorded by Abu Dawood, al-Tirmidhi and al-Nasaa`ee. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* #6538.



said, "Whoever forgets while he is fasting and eats or drinks something should complete his fast, for it was Allah who fed him or gave him to drink."[236]

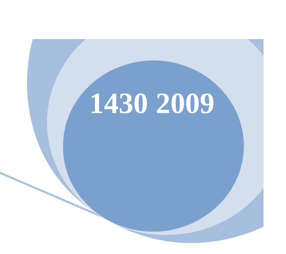
(3) Intentionally vomiting: If a person is overcome by nausea and vomits, then he does not have to make up the fast nor is there any expiation in his case.

(4 and 5) Menstruation and post-partum bleeding. Even if these occur at the last moment before sundown, they break the fast according to the consensus of the scholars.

(6) Sexual intercourse. The one who commits this act must perform the expiation that is described in the following hadith: Abu Hurairah narrated: While we were sitting with the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) a man came and said, "O Messenger of Allah, I have been destroyed." He asked him, "What has happened to you?" He replied, "I had intercourse with my wife while I was fasting." The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) then told him, "Do you have a slave that you can free?" He replied, "No." He then said, "Can you fast two months consecutively?" he replied, "No." The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) then asked him, "Can you feed sixty poor people?" He replied, "No." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) then kept silent when a big basket full of dates was brought to him. He said, "Where is the questioner?" The man replied, "It is I." The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) told him, "Take these dates and give them in charity." The man said, "To someone poorer than I, O Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)? By Allah, there is no family between Madinah's mountains poorer than I." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) laughed to such an extent that his premolars could be seen. He then said, "Feed your family with it."

Muhammad ibn Uthaimeen was once asked whether a person who embraces Islam during the daytime of Ramadaan must commence fasting immediately. His response was, "If a non-Muslim embraces Islam during the daytime of Ramadaan, it is obligatory upon him to fast the remainder of that day as he

[236] Recorded by Muslim.



is now one of the people upon whom the fasting is obligatory. However, he does not have to make up that day at a later date [due to the portion of the day that he missed]. Similarly, he does not have to make up the days of that month of Ramadan that he did not fast before becoming Muslim."[237]

The Pilgrimage to the House of Allah in Makkah

The next pillar of Islam mentioned in this narration of this hadith is making the pilgrimage to the House of Allah, or the Kaaba. Linguistically, *hajj* means, "He repaired, or betook himself, to, or towards a person... or towards an object of reverence, veneration, respect or honour."[238] In Islamic Law, it means a particular journey at a particular time to a particular place for the purpose of worshipping Allah. In other words, it is the journeying to Makkah during the months designated for the performance of Hajj as an act of worship for the sake of Allah.

The performance of *Hajj* is an obligation upon every Muslim who has the means to perform it. This can be clearly proven from the Quran and Sunnah. However, it is much more than an obligation. It is one of the foundations or pillars of Islam itself.

The reward for the performance of the *Hajj* is great. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Whoever performs the Hajj for the sake of Allah and does not commit any lewdness or sins returns like the day in which his mother gave him birth," that is, without any sins.[239]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said, "One *Umrah*[240] until the next *Umrah* is an expiation for what is between them. And the Hajj that is accepted by Allah and performed properly has no reward other than Paradise."[241]

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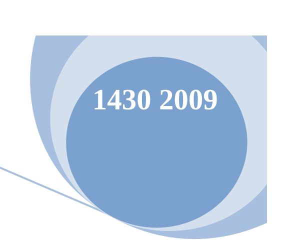
[237] Ali Abu Lauz, *Answers*, p. 24.

[238] E. W. Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon* (Cambridge, England: The Islamic Texts Society, 1984), vol. 1, p. 513.

[239] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[240] *Umrah* is sometimes called the "lesser pilgrimage". It contains less rites and may be done throughout the year.

[241] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.



Another hadith reads: The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) was asked, "What is the best deed?" He stated, "Belief in Allah and His Messenger." He was then asked, "What next?" He said, "Jihad in the way of Allah." He was again asked, "What next?" He replied, "The Hajj which is performed correctly and accepted by Allah."[242]

Furthermore, Hajj is equivalent to Jihad for women and people who are not capable of Jihad. In one hadith, the Prophet was asked whether or not women are required to take part in Jihad. He answered, "Yes, upon them is the Jihad which does not contain fighting: Hajj and Umrah."[243]

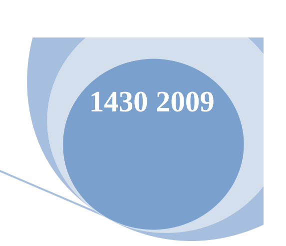
Hajj has numerous benefits to it. Besides those mentioned in the hadith, one can note that it is a place for Muslims from all around the world to come and worship Allah together. This is an excellent opportunity for Muslims to meet each other, understand each other and get closer to each other. Furthermore, all differences between them are swept away as they all dress in a similar fashion and perform the same rituals. The poor, the rich and all others are all standing in the same manner in front of Allah.

Siddiqi describes the significance of Hajj in the following manner,

It is rightly said that it [the Hajj] is the perfection of faith since it combines in itself all the distinctive qualities of other obligatory acts. It represents the quality of *salat* [prayer] since a pilgrim offers prayers in the Kaba, the House of the Lord. It encourages spending of material wealth for the sake of the Lord, the chief characteristic of Zakat. When a pilgrim sets out for Hajj, he dissociates himself from his hearth and home, from his dear and near ones to please the Lord. He suffers privation and undertakes the hardship of journey—the lessons we learn from fasting and *itikaf*.[244] In Hajj one is trained to be completely forgetful of the material comforts and pomp and show of worldly life. One has to sleep on stony ground[245], circumambulate the Kaba, run be-

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[242] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[243] Recorded by Ahmad and ibn Majah. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. al-Albani, *Irwa*, vol. 4, p. 151.
[244] *Itikaf* is were one secludes himself in the mosque for personal worship and devotion. Most commonly, this is done at the end of the month of Ramadan.
[245] This is not a must but it is how many pilgrims spend their nights.



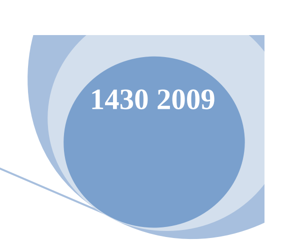
tween Safa and Marwa and spend his night and day wearing only two pieces of unsewn cloth. He is required to avoid the use of oil or scent or any other perfume. He is not even allowed to get his hair cut or trim his beard. In short, he is commanded to abandon everything for the sake of Allah and submit himself before his Lord, the ultimate aim of the life of a Muslim. In fact, physical pilgrimage is a prelude to spiritual pilgrimage to God, when man would bid goodbye to everything of the world and present himself before Him as His humble servant saying: "Here I am before Thee, my Lord, as a slave of Thine."[246]

Hajj is obligatory once in a lifetime upon anyone who has the means to perform it. Allah says in the Quran, "And Hajj to the House is a duty that mankind owes to Allah, those who can afford the expenses. And whoever disbelieves, then Allah stands not in need of any of the worlds" (3:97). Similarly, when responding to the question of Gabriel, the Prophet (peace be upon him) also specifically pointed out that Hajj is obligatory upon the one who has the means to perform it.

Scholars differ as to exactly how this condition is to be met. In general, though, it shows that Hajj is not meant to be a hardship. It is a great act of worship that people should do their best to perform but only if it is feasible for them. In general, this feasibility includes having the physical health, financial well-being and the provisions needed to undertake the Hajj. Some scholars also add that the journey should not be so treacherous that the pilgrim's life is put at risk. In addition, women must have a *mahram* [male relative or husband] to travel with them as they are not allowed to travel alone, although some scholars allow them to travel in "trustworthy" groups made up of men and women.

If one does not meet these conditions, one is not obliged to perform the Hajj. He must wait until he has the ability to perform it. When he does have the ability to perform it, there is a difference of opinion over whether he must perform it immediately at that time or if he may delay it until a future year. That is the next topic of discussion.

[246] Siddiqi, vol. 2, p. 577. The last statement he made is very close to what the pilgrims chant during the pilgrimage.



There is a difference of opinion over whether or not the performance of Hajj may be delayed. That is, suppose there is a person who has not fulfilled the obligation of Hajj and he has the means and ability to make Hajj this year. If he decides to delay its performance until some later year, is he considered sinful or not? Is it permissible for him to delay it or must he perform it the first time that he has the opportunity to perform it?

Malik, Abu Hanifa, Ahmad and some Shafi'is state that one must perform Hajj at its first feasible opportunity. Otherwise, one is being sinful. Evidence for this position includes:

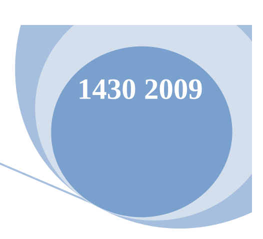
The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "If anyone breaks [a bone] or becomes lame, he comes out of the sacred state and he must perform the Hajj the following year."[247] The deduction from this hadith is that if one can perform the Hajj whenever he wishes, the Prophet (peace be upon him) would not have explicitly mentioned that the person should perform the Hajj in the following year.

Another hadith states, "Hurry to perform the Hajj, that is, the obligatory one, as none of you knows what may happen to him."[248]

It is also narrated that Umar ibn al-Khattab once said, "I considered sending men to those lands to see who had the means but did not perform the Hajj. They should have the *jizya* [249] applied to them as they are not Muslims, they are not Muslims." [250]

One of the strongest pieces of evidence presented for saying that one is allowed to delay his performance of Hajj, even though he has the ability to perform it, is the fact that Hajj was made obligatory in the 6th year after the Hijrah and the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) himself did not per-

[247] Recorded by Ahmad, Abu Dawud, al-Nasaa'i and others. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami*, vol. 2, p. 1112.
[248] Recorded by Ahmad. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. Al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jami*, vol. 1, p. 569.
[249] *Jizya* is a tax paid to the state by the non-Muslim citizens in lieu of military service.
[250] This narration was recorded by Saeed ibn Mansur and al-Baihaqi. According to al-Haitami, this is an authentic narration. Al-Haitami, *al-Zawajir*, vol. 1, p. 198.



form the Hajj until the tenth year. However, Al-Shaukaani has offered the following response to this argument,

[First,] there is a difference of opinion concerning when Hajj became an obligation. One of the opinions is that it became obligatory in the 10th year. Hence, there was no delay [on the part of the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him)]. If it is accepted that it was obligatory before the 10th year, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) delayed his performance because of his dislike to perform the Hajj in the company of the polytheists, as they would perform the Hajj and circumambulate the Kaaba in the nude. When Allah purified the House of those people, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) made Hajj. Hence, he delayed his Hajj due to an excuse. [That is acceptable,] the dispute is only concerning one who delays his Hajj without any valid excuse.[251]

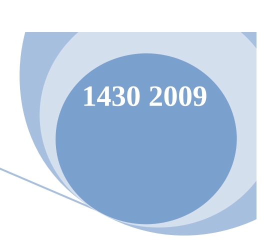
The one who denies the obligation of the Hajj is a disbeliever. The person who intentionally delays his performance of Hajj, although he had the means, until he dies is an evildoer. He has left himself open to the punishment and displeasure of Allah in the Hereafter.

The actual rites of the Hajj are many and various. Pilgrims come from all over the world. They are required to wear specific clothing. They perform different rites on specified days. On the ninth of the Islamic month of Dhu-l-Hijjah, for example, they gather on the mount of Arafah and pray to Allah, beseeching His forgiveness and mercy.

By the grace and mercy of Allah, there are many organizations today that arrange the pilgrimage for Muslims from all over the world. Some of these organizations specialize in taking Muslim converts to the pilgrimage. The author prays that every new Muslim will be able to perform this blessed event in

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[251] Muhammad ibn Ali al-Shaukaani, *Nail al-Autaar*, (Riyadh: Dar Zamam, 1993), vol. 4, pp. 337-338. Ibn Uthaimeen states that the Hajj was made obligatory in the ninth year and the number of delegations coming to meet with the Prophet (peace be upon him) in Madina is one of the reasons that the Prophet (peace be upon him) was not able to perform the Hajj. See Muhammad ibn Uthaimeen, *Al-Sharh al-Mumti' ala Zaad al-Mustaqni'* (Riyadh: Mu'assasat Asaam, 1996), vol. 7, pp. 17-18.



the company of learned Muslims who can guide them and instruct them along the way.

Conclusions

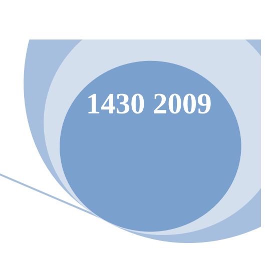
Obviously, there are many details concerning the ritual acts of worship that fall beyond the scope of this work. By the grace of Allah, numerous works are now available in English that provide those details for non-Arabic speakers. Specifically, this author would recommend the following works:

The Concise Presentation of the Fiqh of the Sunnah and the Noble Book by Abdul Adheem ibn Badawi (published by the International Islamic Publishing House in Riyadh) is a good, brief introduction to all fields of Islamic law.

Minhaj al-Muslim by Abu Bakr al-Jazairi (published in two volumes by Darussalam in Riyadh) covers most of the basics of all parts of the law.

Fiqh al-Sunnah by al-Sayyid Sabiq—this five-volume work may be a bit heavy and detailed for the new Muslim. However, over time, it should become a reference well worth looking into.

There are also a number of important works concerning specific ritual acts. Al-Albaani's *The Prophet's Prayer Described* is the most detailed description of the prayer in English. Mamdouh Muhammad's *The Hajj from A to Z* and *The Salat from A to Z* are also quite popular.



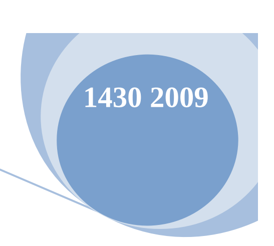
The Behavior and Social Interaction of a Believer

Allah says in the Quran, "O believers! Enter completely into Islam" (2:208). As stated earlier, Islam is a comprehensive religion. Its teachings touch upon all aspects of life. This is because in every aspect of life, the Muslim should be worshipping and serving Allah. There is no compartment of life that can ever fall outside of that general precept.

Islam, therefore, goes well beyond articles of faith and ritual acts of worship. All of a Muslim's behavior, manners, ethics and practices must reflect his belief that there is none worthy of worship except Allah. It is inconceivable that someone should claim to be worshipping Allah while at the same time he mistreats this person, cheats another person and harms yet a third. This kind of behavior would demonstrate that his claim to belief is either outright false or is very diseased.

For a new convert to Islam, this comprehensiveness may mean that there are many things that he will have to change about himself in order to be a complete and true Muslim. He may have many character flaws from his pre-Islamic days that he will have to work on and correct. He has no choice but to intend to change his ways. He is now stating his belief in Islam. If his belief is true, it must mean that he is willing to accept what the faith is teaching him and he is willing to do his best to implement all of the faith in his life.

As his understanding of Islam increases and as his faith strengthens, many behaviors may change "automatically," as he now has a new view on life and a correct understanding of reality. This author has witnessed such changes in new Muslims. For example, some non-Muslims get very upset when participating in sports. Any time things do not go their way or when they feel that the other team is getting some unfair advantage, this sets off an angry rage in some individuals. This rage reflects how much weight and importance they are giving to that sports activity. After becoming Muslims, some such individuals change completely. Now, all of a sudden, sports are just for fun and exercise. The new Muslim understands that sports have no long-term value to a person's real worth. This new understanding of his reality automatically—and sometimes even imperceptibly from the individual's point of view—changes the person's behavior and character.



The goal is to make such a transformation with respect to all interactions one has. This transformation is assisted by knowledge of how one is supposed to behave. Therefore, in this chapter, after an introductory section on the importance of behavior and character, the following interactions will be discussed:

(1) A Muslim vis-à-vis his own self.
(2) A Muslim vis-à-vis his/her parents.
(3) A Muslim vis-à-vis his/her spouse.
(4) A Muslim vis-à-vis his/her children.
(5) A Muslim vis-à-vis his/her neighbors.
(6) A Muslim vis-à-vis other Muslims.
(7) A Muslim vis-à-vis non-Muslims.
(8) A Muslim vis-à-vis society as a whole.
(9) A Muslim vis-à-vis wealth and property.

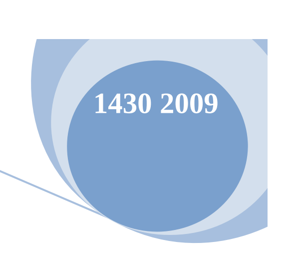
Islam's Emphasis on Proper Behavior, Manners and Etiquette

In an emphatic hadith, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated, "I have been sent only for the purpose of perfecting good morals."[252] In this hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) has clearly stated that one of the important aspects of his being sent as a prophet was to show what the good morals, behavior and manners are. This is a clear sign that behavior and manners clearly fall within the scope of the teachings of Islam. A Muslim cannot escape this fact and he must adjust his behavior accordingly.

There are actually numerous statements of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) related to the importance of having good character. Here, just a few will be presented to simply highlight the importance of this topic.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "I am a guarantor of a house in the highest part of Paradise for the one who makes his behavior good."[253] This hadith clearly shows the reward for improving and

[252] Recorded by al-Haakim and others. Graded *sahih* by al-Albani in *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer*, number 2349.
[253] Recorded by Abu Dawud. Graded *hasan* by al-Albani in *Sahih al-Jami' al-Sagheer*, number 1464.

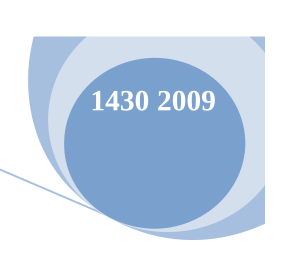


perfecting one's behavior. Some people claim that their character is simply what they are born with and there is nothing they can do to change or adjust it. That is simply not true. As demonstrated earlier, much of the driving force behind one's character has to do with what one believes about God, this life, the Hereafter and so on. Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Piety and righteousness is being of good character."[254] Piety is achievable but it may take some effort. In fact, when the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) described the hypocrites, those of weak or false faith, he described them by their actions and behavior: lying while speaking, breaking one's trust and so on.[255]

Once again, the example *par excellence* for the behavior of a Muslim is found in the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). By the grace and mercy of Allah, Allah sent the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), a human being who was a husband, father, member of society, leader of society and so forth, to exemplify for the believers who one should behave in a manner that is pleasing to Allah.[256] He demonstrated how the Quran is to be applied in practical, daily life. Thus, Aishah, his wife, said about him, "His character was that of the Quran."[257] Thus, one finds that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sincere, honest, grateful and straightforward. He was humble, patient, calm and forgiving. He would not lie, backbite or slander others. He had a cheerful disposition and would treat all classes of society with proper respect. This is all part and parcel of what it means to behave like a believer.

From an Islamic perspective, character and manners are also comprehensive. In other words, one must have the proper behavior and actions with respect to his Creator, with respect to his own soul, with respect to the others

[254] Recorded by Muslim.
[255] Found in a hadith recorded by al-Bukhari.
[256] This author has written elsewhere: "This is an aspect that many people today seem to overlook. There is a lot of talk about following the Sunnah but the Sunnah is not simply the number of prayers in a day, fasts in a month, length of one's clothing or style of dress. The Sunnah is much more than that. As was noted earlier, the Prophet (peace be upon him) was sent with the most excellent morals and behavior. This is an outstanding and necessary part of his mission. This is an extremely important part of his Sunnah that everyone should try to emulate." *Commentary on the Forty Hadith of al-Nawawi*.
[257] Recorded by Muslim.



he interacts with, with respect to the other beings on earth and with respect to all parts of creation. (Some of these categories will be discussed further in this chapter.)

The most important category is behavior with respect to the Creator, as that will influence all of the other categories. This embodies having the proper relationship with Allah and submitting to Him in a sincere fashion with a correct attitude. Aspects of this relationship have been touched upon throughout this work.

The last two categories stated above imply good behavior toward all other living creatures on earth as well as all that Allah has placed within this cosmos. A Muslim is not free to behave in any way he wishes with respect to animals or inanimate objects. Indeed, he will be answerable to Allah concerning his behavior towards all things. Everything in this creation that has been put at the disposal of humankind is nothing more than a trust from God. There are, for example, numerous hadith that touch upon how Muslims should treat animals. For example, even with respect to slaughtering an animal for consumption, which Allah has permitted humans, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Verily, Allah has prescribed excellence in all things. Thus, if you kill, kill in a good manner. If you slaughter, slaughter in a good manner. Each of you should sharpen his blade and spare suffering to the animal he is slaughtering."[258] This fact was not lost on the early Muslims as can be seen in the statement of al-Fudail ibn Iyaad, "By Allah, it is not allowed for you to harm a dog or a pig without just cause, how then can you harm a Muslim?"[259]

(1) A Muslim vis-à-vis His Own Self

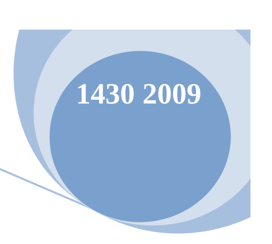
The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained that a person's own self has a right over him.[260] Indeed, an individual has very important responsibilities with respect to his own self. Logically speaking, a person's

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[258] Recorded by Muslim.

[259] Quoted in Muhammad al-Dhahabi, *Siyar A'laam al-Nubala* (Beirut: Mu'assasah al-Risaalah, 1990), vol. 8, p. 427.

[260] As found in the lengthy hadith of Salmaan, recorded by al-Bukhari and al-Tirmidhi.



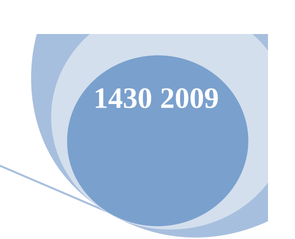
self has a right and duty to do what is best for it. It is only reasonable that a person should do what he can to keep his soul from being destroyed.

Furthermore, every human must realize that he did not create himself. He is not his own lord. He cannot even claim for himself the right to use his own self or body in any way that he wills, although this is something that one hears often nowadays. Islam teaches that humans have been created by an All-Knowing, All-Merciful God. Thus, even with respect to his own self, the human must obey its Creator and Lord. In turn, the Creator has actually commanded the human only to do what is best for its own self.

Actually, the Creator has shown him the way to save himself. This is achieved by exerting oneself to accept wholeheartedly what Allah has revealed and to do what is pleasing to the Lord. In the long-run, in reality, all of the guidance that has come from Allah—the religion of Islam itself—is simply for the benefit of the individual himself. Allah is neither benefited by being worshipped nor harmed by being belied. Thus, in numerous places in the Quran, Allah makes it clear that all of this merciful guidance is simply at the disposal of the humans for their own benefit: "Verily We have revealed the book to you in truth, for (instructing) mankind. He, then, who receives guidance benefits his own soul. But he who strays injures his own soul. Nor are you [O Muhammad] set over them to dispose of their affairs" (39:41; see also, for example, 6:104 and 41:46); "Who receives guidance, receives it for his own benefit. Who goes astray does so to his own loss. No bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another nor would We visit with Our wrath until We had sent a messenger (to give warning)" (*Al-Isra* 17:15); "And whoever purifies himself does so for the benefit of his own soul; and the destination (of all) is to Allah" (35:18).

Everything explained in this book is actually for the individual so that he may fulfill his responsibilities toward his own self and establish the proper relationship with his Creator, God and Lord. Thus, all of this book that the reader is reading can be considered an explanation of this particular subsection.

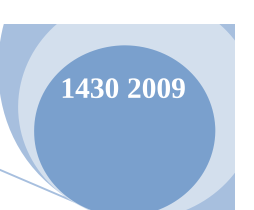
Hence, in this section, the author would like to speak about a very particular aspect that demonstrates that Islam attends to the guidance of a hu-



man in every aspect of his life. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated while speaking to Abdullah ibn Amr, "Your body has a right upon you. Your eye has a right upon you..."[261] Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has explained many aspects of personal hygiene and practice that are in tune with the true nature of humans. In other words, the soul naturally recognizes that these are good and beautiful practices. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) therefore referred to them as *sunan al-fitra* or "the acts corresponding to the sound, adulterated nature of humans." These acts are mentioned by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in the following hadith: The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Five are from among the natural practices: circumcision, shaving the pubic hairs, plucking the armpit hairs, clipping the nails and trimming the moustache."[262] In another statement, he said, "Ten are from among the natural practices: trimming the moustache, leaving the beard to grow, using the toothstick, [cleaning] by putting water in the nose, clipping the nails, washing the knuckles and finger joints, plucking the underarm hairs, shaving the pubic hairs, using water to clean the private part [after urinating]." Zakariyyaa then said, "Musab said, 'I have forgotten the tenth, unless it is rinsing one's mouth.'"[263] Although scholars differ as to whether these acts or obligatory or highly recommended, there is no question that if an individual truly wants to treat his self properly, with the proper hygiene and outward appearance, he will adhere to all of these practices that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has praised in these hadith.

In addition to such hygienic issues, Islam also guides the individual concerning his eating and drinking. For example, Allah has prohibited the consumption of alcohol: "O you who believe! Alcohol, gambling, idols, and arrows for seeking luck or decisions are an abomination of Satan's handiwork. So avoid (strictly all) that (abomination) in order that you may be successful" (5:90). Similarly, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "All intoxicants are forbidden."[264] Allah has given instructions as to what types of foods may be eaten as well: "He has forbidden you only the carrion, and

[261] Recorded by al-Bukhari.
[262] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[263] Recorded by Muslim.
[264] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

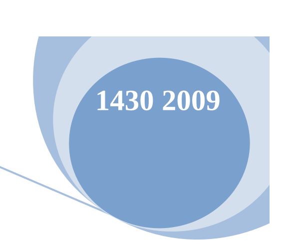


blood, and the flesh of swine, and that which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah" (2:173); "Forbidden to you (for food) are: carrion, blood, the flesh of swine, and the meat of that which has been slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah (or has been slaughtered for idols, or on which Allah's Name has not been mentioned while slaughtering), and that which has been killed by strangling, or by a violent blow, or by a headlong fall, or by the goring of horns - and that which has been (partly) eaten by a wild animal - unless you are able to slaughter it (before its death) - and that which is sacrificed (slaughtered) on stone altars. (Forbidden) also is to use arrows seeking luck or decision, (all) that is disobedience of Allah and sin" (5:3); "Say (O Muhammad): I find not in that which has been inspired to me anything forbidden to be eaten by one who wishes to eat it, unless it be carrion, or blood poured forth (by slaughtering or the like), or the flesh of swine (pork, etc.) for that surely is impure, or impious (unlawful) meat (of an animal) which is slaughtered as a sacrifice for others than Allah (or has been slaughtered for idols, or on which Allah's Name has not been mentioned while slaughtering). But whosoever is forced by necessity without willful disobedience, nor transgressing due limits, (for him) certainly, your Lord is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (6:145).

In general, a Muslim can only eat meat slaughtered by a Muslim, Jew or Christian in specified manners. For that reason—without going into the debate that has spread concerning this issue—this author recommends that a Muslim not eat the meat that is sold in the supermarkets of the West. He should restrict himself to what is known as *halal* or *zabihah* meat (slaughtered by Muslims) or kosher meat (slaughtered by Jews).

(2) A Muslim vis-à-vis His/Her Parents

Allah has demanded that Muslims treat their parents in the best possible fashion. Muslims must be grateful people. They must be grateful to Allah and to all who do them well. After Allah, there is perhaps no one who deserves a person's gratitude more than his parents. Thus, numerous verses of the Quran touch upon the question of the treatment of parents. Indeed, in more than one place, Allah has closely tied good behavior towards parents with the command to worship Him alone. Note, for example, the following verse of the Quran: "Worship Allah and join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the



neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and those (slaves) whom your right hands possess. Verily, Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful" (4:36).

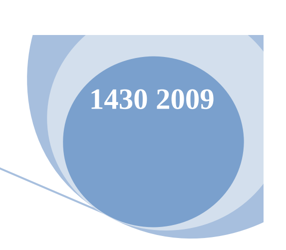
In this verse, Allah has combined His rights over His servants with the servants' rights over each other. Among the servants, a person must treat the following five classes especially well: (1) those that are related to him, especially his parents; (2) those who are weak and in need; (3) those with whom he mixes and sees on a regular basis, such as neighbors; (4) those who come upon a person on a temporary basis, such as a wayfarer; and (5) the slaves that one possesses. In this last category, some of the early scholars also included what one possesses of animals.[265]

Allah also says, "Say (O Muhammad): Come, I will recite what your Lord has prohibited you from: Join not anything in worship with Him; be good and dutiful to your parents…" (6:151); "And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him. And that you be dutiful to your parents. If one of them or both of them attain old age in your life, say not to them a word of disrespect, nor shout at them but address them in terms of honor. And lower unto them the wing of submission and humility through mercy, and say: 'My Lord! Bestow on them Your Mercy as they did bring me up when I was small.' Your Lord knows best what is in your inner-selves. If you are righteous, then, verily, He is Ever Most Forgiving to those who turn unto Him again and again in obedience, and in repentance" (17:23-25); "And (remember) when We took a covenant from the Children of Israel, (saying): Worship none but Allah (Alone) and be dutiful and good to parents" (2:83).

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also emphasized good treatment of one's parents, putting it after prayer in its proper time as a deed that is most beloved to Allah:

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was asked, "What deed is the most beloved to Allah?" He replied, "Prayer in its proper time." He was asked, "Then what deed?" He replied, "Being dutiful to one's

[265] Ibn Rajab, *Jami*, vol. 1, p. 346-348.

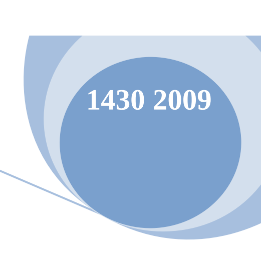


parents." He was asked again, "Then what deed?" He then replied, "Jihad for the sake of Allah."[266]

Allah reminds the believers that their parents, in particular the mother, went through a great deal of hardship and effort to raise their child and therefore they are deserving of love, respect and gratitude in return. Allah says, "And (remember) when Luqmaan said to his son when he was advising him, 'O my son! Join not in worship others with Allah. Verily! Joining others in worship with Allah is a great wrong indeed.' And We have enjoined on man (to be dutiful and good) to his parents. His mother bore him in weakness and hardship upon weakness and hardship, and his weaning is in two years — give thanks to Me and to your parents, unto Me is the final destination" (31:13-14); "And We have enjoined on man to be dutiful and kind to his parents. His mother bears him with hardship and she brings him forth with hardship, and the bearing of him, and the weaning of him is thirty months, till when he attains full strength and reaches forty years, he says: 'My Lord! Grant me the power and ability that I may be grateful for Your Favor which You have bestowed upon me and upon my parents, and that I may do righteous good deeds, such as please You, and make my off-spring good. Truly, I have turned to You in repentance, and truly, I am one of the Muslims (submitting to Your Will)'" (46:15).

Thus, in particular, the mother is deserving of the greatest friendship and closeness from her children. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was once asked, "Who among the people has the most right for my good companionship?" The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied, "Your mother." The man asked, "And then whom?" The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) replied again, "Your mother." The man again asked, "And them whom?" the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) once again said, "Your mother." The man asked once more, "And then whom?" This time the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Your father."[267]

[266] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[267] Recorded by Muslim.



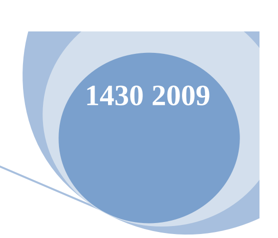
Converts and Relations with Non-Muslim Relatives

The relationship between a new convert and his non-Muslim family and associates can be a difficult one. Many times there is open opposition from the non-Muslims. This is a great trial for the convert. He will obviously still have love for those people who were so close and good to him for many years. An example for the convert under such circumstances is the early converts to Islam in Makkah. These Muslims faced great opposition and many of them were even tortured due to their new faith. Eventually, the small Muslim community was forced to emigrate to different lands to protect their faith. However, they were patient and persevered, thereby pleasing their Lord. They understood that their newfound relationship with God must take precedence over ties with anyone in this world.

When a human meets Allah in the Hereafter, he will meet him as an individual, responsible for his own actions and decisions. The fact that others close to him disliked the truth is obviously not an acceptable excuse to abandon God's religion or even to compromise with respect to God's religion. If such were acceptable to Allah, He certainly would have made that an option for those early Muslims who endured torture and banishment from their lands. However, such an option was not given to them. Actually, such an option implies none other than the destruction of God's religion as there will always be numerous people who oppose the truth and God's way.

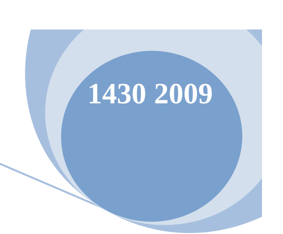
For most converts nowadays, by Allah's grace, the situation is not as strenuous as that described above. There is usually a mixed reaction to a person's conversion: The others respect his choice but may not be completely pleased with the choice that he has made. Under these circumstances in particular it is important for the individual to understand the limits of his relationships with those who do not belong to his faith, even though they do not openly oppose his new faith.

Blood relatives, in particular, still have rights over the new Muslim convert. Al-Bukhari and Muslim record that Asmaa bint Abi Bakr came to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and said, “My mother is coming [from Makkah] and wishes to see me although she is a polytheist. Shall I keep ties with her?” He replied, “Yes, keep ties with your mother.” Allah says



in the Quran, "Allah does not forbid you to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and did not drive you out of your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity" (60:8).[268]Allah also says about non-believing parents in particular, "But if they (the parents both) strive with you to make you join in worship with Me others that of which you have no knowledge, then obey them not, but behave with them in the world kindly, and follow the path of him who turns to Me in repentance and in obedience. Then to Me will be your return, and I shall tell you what you used to do" (31:15). Of course, the individual needs to protect his faith and if the parents are exerting undo pressure on their child, then the son/daughter may have to severe some of his ties with them. However, even then, he should try to do so in the most gracious manner.

[268] Al-Adawi notes that some people may object to the above conclusions, arguing that the following Quranic verses abrogate the verses used as arguments above: "You will not find any people who believe in Allah and the Last Day, making friendship with those who oppose Allah and His Messenger, even though they were their fathers, or their sons, or their brothers, or their kindred (people). For such He has written Faith in their hearts, and strengthened them with true guidance from Himself. And He will admit them to Gardens (Paradise) under which rivers flow, to dwell therein (forever). Allah is pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the Party of Allah. Verily, it is the Party of Allah that will be the successful" (58:22); and, "O you who believe! Take not for supporters and helpers your fathers and your brothers if they prefer disbelief to Belief. And whoever of you does so, then he is one of the wrongdoers" (9:23) Al-Adawi states that one must distinguish between *al-birr* ("righteous conduct"), *al-silah* ("keeping of the ties of kinship") and *al-ihsaan* ("goodness toward others") and *al-tahaabub* ("love") and *al-tawaadud* ("devotion"). The first three are commendable. Also, he says that "natural love and devotion" is different from "religious love and devotion." Thus, a Muslim may love his Christian wife with a strong love while he hates her religion with the strongest hate and aversion. His love for her will lead him to treat her well, feed her with the best food, spend money on her clothing and so on, while at the same time not having any love or approval for her faith. Thus, his love and goodness toward her is one thing and his hate for her religion is something completely different. In fact, at the same time, for example, a Muslim may hate another Muslim for the wrong he has done while still loving him for his faith. Al-Shafi'ee is quoted as saying that keeping in good contact by *al-birr* (righteous conduct), justice, kind words and so forth is not what has been prohibited. Ibn Hajar in *al-Fath* also says that righteous conduct, keeping of ties of kinship and goodness do not imply the kind of love and devotion that is prohibited. He says that verse 58:22 is general for those who are being fought or not being fought. He goes on to refute the claim that there is any abrogation involved between verses 9:5 and 58:22. Mustafa ibn al-Adawi, *Fiqh al-Ta'amul ma al-Waalidain* (Riyadh: Daar Balansiyah, 2002), pp. 61-64.



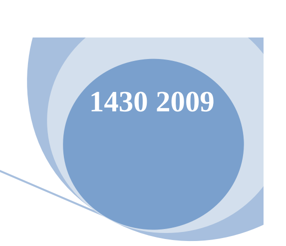
A Muslim, by his very nature, is supposed to be grateful. The Prophet said, "The one who does not thank the people does not truly thank Allah."[269] Thus, a Muslim will always remain grateful and filled with a "natural love" for his non-Muslim parents due to all the kindness and love they showed for him over the years. However, he cannot possess a "religious love" for their actions. That is, from a religious perspective, he can neither condone nor approve of their following a way other than the way of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Thus, he cannot have love for them for the way of life that they have chosen. Whenever there is a conflict between this natural love and religious love, the religious love must take precedence. As Allah has said, "O you who believe! Take not for supporters and helpers your fathers and your brothers if they prefer disbelief to Belief. And whoever of you does so, then he is one of the wrongdoers. Say: If your fathers, your sons, your brothers, your wives, your kindred, the wealth that you have gained, the commerce in which you fear a decline, and the dwellings in which you delight are dearer to you than Allah and His Messenger, and striving hard and fighting in His Cause, then wait until Allah brings about His Decision (torment). And Allah guides not the people who are the rebellious, disobedient to Allah" (9:23-24).[270]

Thus, it is not the right of any Muslim to show any approval for their false forms of worship. Allah has guided the convert to the one and only truth and it should be his earnest desire that those close to him would also embrace the truth. While keeping cordial relations with all of those around him, the convert must be clear to himself and to others around him that he can neither approve of nor participate in any form of worship that he must now recognize as being false. A Muslim then is not allowed to celebrate Christmas, for example.[271] Their belief that this is a celebration of the birth of the son of God and

[269] Recorded by Ahmad and al-Tirmidhi.

[270] Many people today do not know Islam or what they think they know about Islam is false. Hence, the convert should take the time to explain to them the truth about Islam.

[271] Many non-Muslims do not have any form of "religious honor or dignity." That is, they see no harm in participating in practices that strike at the very root of their own beliefs. Thus, when Western Christians visit India, for example, they find no problem in paying homage at Hindu temples as part of their visit or vacation. Since many of them have such attitudes toward their own faith, they find it difficult to see why the Muslim convert is not still willing to participate in Christmas and other practices. In essence, this is related to how seriously one takes one's religion. A Muslim must take his religion seriously, even if many people of other faiths today do not. Hence, a



the savior strikes at the very root of the Muslim's monotheism. A Muslim could not possibly participate in such a celebration. He also cannot wish that others enjoy such a celebration nor exchange gifts in joy for such an occasion. Instead, he leaves the others to their forms of worship and celebration while making it very clear that participating in such practices would be nothing short of a compromise and contradiction of his new faith. With a calm and clear explanation, it would be hoped that those around him would respect and accept his decision to remain away from such religious practices that are not consistent with his new faith.

Part of keeping ties with one's relatives would include visiting them. Especially if part of the intention behind the visit is to allow one's relatives to see a Muslim and learn true information about Islam, there is no question that such visiting is sanctioned. The Prophet visited his polytheist uncle Abu Taalib while he was ill[272] as well as a young Jewish boy who was on his deathbed.[273] He would accept their invitations for meals. In fact, it is even confirmed that the Prophet visited Abdullah ibn Ubayy ibn Salool on his deathbed, even though the Prophet knew that Abdullah was the leader of the hypocrites and an opponent of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).[274]

There are obviously some limits to what types of visits and what activities a Muslim can participate in. Among the common issues that arises for new converts is that of attending the funerals of deceased relatives. Based on reports from early Muslim scholars, the Muslim does pay his condolences to the family and is present during that time but remains distant from the specific acts of the funeral process, especially anything of a religious overtone. The obvious goal is to remain away from any act that may contradict the Islamic faith in any way. When Ali's father Abu Taalib died as a non-Muslim, the Prophet told him to go and burry his father. Ali then did so.[275] There is also a

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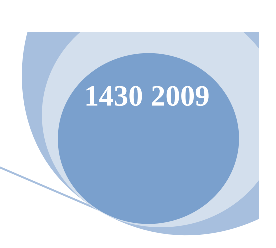
Muslim can never partake in any practice that he knows is blasphemous or not sanctioned by Islamic Law.

[272] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[273] Recorded by al-Bukhari.

[274] Recorded by Abu Dawood, al-Haakim and others. See al-Bakri and al-Aaroori, footnotes to ibn al-Qayyim, *Ahkaam Ahl al-Dhimmah*, vol. 1, pp. 430-431.

[275] The Hadith of Ali and Abu Taalib is recorded by Abu Dawood, al-Nasaa`ee, Ahmad and others. It is an acceptable narration according to al-Bakri and al-Aaroori. See their footnotes to ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 1,p. 435-436.



report that ibn Abbaas, the Companion of the Prophet, was asked about a Muslim whose Christian father had died and he replied, "He should attend and bury him."[276]

When offering condolences to non-Muslims, one may wish them well, hoping that nothing but good reaches them and encouraging them to be patient. It is not allowed to seek forgiveness for those who, it is known, died while outside of the fold of Islam. Such has been prohibited in the Quran. Allah says, "It is not (proper) for the Prophet and those who believe to ask Allah's Forgiveness for the polytheists and idolaters, even though they be of kin, after it has become clear to them that they are the dwellers of the Fire (because they died in a state of disbelief)" (9:113)

(3) A Muslim vis-à-vis His/Her Spouse[277]

Marriage is a very important institution in Islam. The family is the nucleus for society as a whole. If the family is on a sound foundation, it is more likely that society as a whole will be in a good state. Thus, in general, the messengers of God, the prime examples for humans, adhered to this institution of marriage. Allah states, "Verily, We have sent messengers before you and appointed for them spouses and children" (13:38). The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also established marriage as his way of life, saying, "By Allah, I am the most fearful of Allah of you and I have the most piety; however, I fast and break my fast, pray [at night] and sleep and I marry women. Whoever turns away from my Sunnah is not of me."[278]

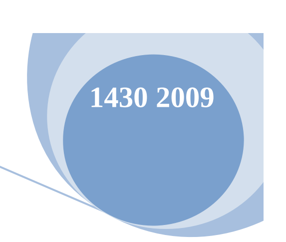
The Quran shows that there is a clear bond between men and women. In numerous places in the Quran, Allah reminds humans that they are from the same original human being. It is through this bond that they are intercon-

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[276] See ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 1, p. 437. There is a report recorded by ibn Abi Shaibah that Umm al-Haarith died while a Christian and the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) attended her funeral. However, this report is weak. See fns to ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 1, p. 432-433. For numerous other reports concerning this issue, of varying degrees of authenticity, see ibn al-Qayyim, vol. 1, pp. 432-437.

[277] For more details on the Islamic laws of marriage, see the author's "The Fiqh of the Family, Marriage and Divorce" (American Open University, 1997), *passim*. The discussion here is based on sections of that work.

[278] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

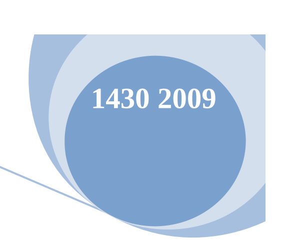


nected and through these bonds that some of their rights upon one another are established. Allah states at the opening of *surah al-Nisaa'*, "O mankind! Be dutiful to your Lord, Who created you from a single person, and from him He created his wife, and from them both He created many men and women and fear Allah through whom you demand your mutual (rights), and (do not cut the relations of) the wombs (kinship)! Surely, Allah is Ever an All-Watcher over you" (4:1).

However, beyond that beginning that the two sexes have in common, Allah points out that the love and affection that He has created in the hearts of the spouses towards another is one of His great signs that act as portents for those people of understanding. In other words, such people can look at this aspect of creation and be reminded of the greatness of Allah's work and power, the perfection of His creation and the magnificent mercy Allah has placed in this world. Allah says, "And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose and comfort in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. Verily, in that are indeed Signs for a people who reflect" (30:21). Allah also says, "He it is who created you from a single person (Adam), and then He has created from him his wife, in order that he might enjoy the pleasure of living with her" (7:189).

Thus, according to the Quran, the relationship between a man and his wife should be one of love, mercy and mutual understanding. Allah also commands men to treat their wives kindly in the verse, "And consort with your wives in a goodly manner, for if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something which Allah might yet make a source of abundant good" (4:19).

A few words about the purpose of marriage in Islam should be given. This is needed because many times people enter into marriage or desire to get married without realizing the roles and purpose of marriage itself. In turn, they do not realize the kinds of responsibilities that will be on their shoulders when they do get married. However, if the purposes of marriage are known and the responsibilities that marriage will entail are understood at the outset, once again, the probability that the marriage will be a successful marriage will be enhanced. The person will know what is expected of him, both with respect to his responsibilities and duties and his rights.



Obviously, the purpose of marriage is not simply "fun" or the release of "animal urges". There is much more to marriage than that. Some of the goals behind marriage include[279]: procreating, experiencing permissible physical pleasure, attainment of one's complete maturity, mutually assisting one another in making one's life in this world, attaining numerous psychological and physiological benefits, forming the cornerstone of a moral society, bringing up the next generation in a setting that is most conducive for moral and spiritual growth and binding peoples and families together.

Whom One Can Wed

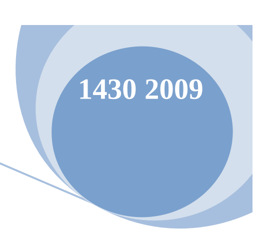
In *soorah al-Nisaa'* verses 22-24, Allah has delineated what women a Muslim man may marry. Those categories are straightforward. However, there are a couple of issues that may be of extreme importance for Muslim converts, especially those living in non-Muslim lands. (Note that the question of remaining with non-Muslim spouses was discussed earlier.)

One important issue is that of marrying men or women who are not chaste. There is a difference of opinion among the scholars over whether or not it is allowed to marry a woman whom one knows to be a fornicatress.[280] The majority of the scholars (meaning the Malikis, Shafiis and Hanafis) seem to think it is disapproved but allowable while a group of scholars say that it is forbidden. The difference of opinion revolves around the understanding of the verse, "The fornicator marries none but a fornicatress or a polytheistic woman and the fornicatress marries none but a fornicator or a polytheist. Such a thing is forbidden for the believers" (24:3). The majority of the scholars state that this verse is showing that the act of marriage with such a woman is blameworthy but not prohibited. They also based this on the following hadith: "A man came to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) and said, 'I have a wife who is most beloved to me but she does not keep the hand of the toucher[281]

[279] Cf., Abdul Rahman Abdul Khaaliq, *Al-Zawaaj fi Dhill al-Islaam* (Kuwait: al-Daar al-Salafiyyah, 1988), pp. 21ff.

[280] A parallel discussion could be given for the question of a woman marrying a man who is known to be a fornicator.

[281] A form of this Arabic word can be in reference to sexual intercourse. However, when it is explicitly used with the word, "hand", as it is in this narration of the hadith, it is in reference to touch and not to sexual intercourse. Allah knows best.



from her.' He said, 'Divorce her.' The man replied, 'But I cannot live without her.' He said, 'Then enjoy her with that [deficiency]."

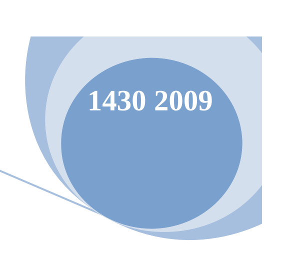
However, a number of early scholars clearly stated that it is forbidden to marry a fornicatress until she repents from her act of fornication. This was the opinion of Ahmad ibn Hanbal among others. This seems to be the strongest and correct opinion based on the verse above. As for the hadith that is quoted, Imam Ahmad considered it a weak hadith. Assuming it is authentic, as some scholars have stated, it is not explicit that the woman would actually commit illegal sexual intercourse. Instead, one could say that the woman was a little promiscuous or free with other men but not to the extent that she would commit illegal sexual intercourse. If a man has a wife of that nature, he should divorce her as the Prophet (peace be upon him) explicitly told the man in this hadith. This, in fact, is further evidence that one should not marry a fornicatress.

It could be argued that in the case of a Muslim convert, he should be extremely careful about this issue. If the person is new to Islam, he should want to be with a spouse who would improve his faith and strengthen his resolve to worship Allah properly. A spouse of immoral character would obviously not be the right choice for anyone hoping to be a true believer but it may be even more dangerous for someone whose faith is still new and vulnerable.

Another important question is whether it is allowed for a Muslim man to marry a Jewish or Christian woman. This has been a hotly debated question among the scholars, with the majority permitting it (based on Quranic verse 5:5), a minority prohibiting it and another minority applying strict conditions to it.[282] Without getting into the details of that debate, once again, for the con-

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[282] Even those who allow it (and disapprove of it) lay down some conditions for its permissibility. (1) She must be practicing her religion. (2) The woman must not be from *Ahl al-Harb* (those peoples who are at war with the Muslims). Ibn Abu Shaibah records in his *Musannaf* that ibn Abbaas stated, "It is not allowed to marry the women of the People of the Book if they are from the people fighting Islam." Similar statements were also made by other early scholars. The difference between *ahl al-Dhimmah* (the non-Muslim women citizens living under the control of the Muslim state) and others seems to be clear, especially when compared to the women living in, for example, the United States. In the United States, the courts tend to favor the mother in custody battles and aspects of that nature, without taking into consideration the question of the religion of the child. Such would not be the case in an Islamic state. (3) The Woman must be *afeefah* or



vert, he should consider his particular situation carefully. Being new to Islam, he should not open up doors to temptation and reverting from his new faith. It is not expected that non-Muslim women will support him in his faith and aid him to grow in his faith like pious Muslim women would. Hence, there is no question that, in general, converts to Islam should refrain from marrying non-Muslim women.

As for a Muslim woman or a female convert marrying a non-Muslim man, Al-Ghummaari wrote, "The marriage of a Muslim woman to a non-Muslim man is forbidden, as is clearly stated in the Quran, and this is something that is known by necessity in the religion. If anyone believes that such a marriage is permissible, he is definitively a disbeliever."[283] In general, the man is the head of the household. Hence, women marrying non-Muslim men presents a much greater danger for the woman and is thus prohibited.

The Rights of a Husband and a Wife

The first thing that every married person must realize that one's spouse is first and foremost another Muslim. He/she is one's brother/sister in Islam. Therefore, all the rights that fall upon a Muslim due to the general brotherhood of Islam are also due to one's spouse. There are books on the behavior of a Muslim, brotherhood and love and loyalty among Muslims and all of those principles apply to a married person as his spouse is part of that Islamic brotherhood and community. Furthermore, the Prophet (peace be upon him) also stressed this point when he stated, "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."[284] However, one's spouse has even more rights upon a person due to the great and important contract that has been contracted between them.[285]

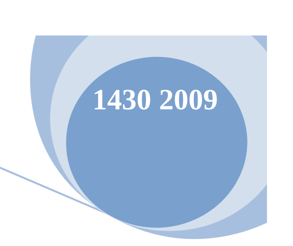
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chaste. A Muslim is not allowed to marry a Jewish or Christian woman who is unchaste, who does not believe that fornication and adultery are bad and so forth.

[283] Abdullah al-Ghumaari, *Rafu al-Shakk wa al-Irtiyaab an Tahreem Nisaa' Ahl al-Kitaab* (Tanjah, Morocco: 1989), p. 25.

[284] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[285] Allah says in the Quran, "And how could you take it [back] while you have gone in unto each other and they have taken from you a firm and strong covenant" (4:21).



Therefore, when discussing the rights of the husbands and wives, this matter should not be looked at in a cold or legal fashion. The relationship between the husband and wife must be much more than a matter of rights stated by the law that each must abide by. Instead, it should be a relationship of love, support and mutual understanding. Each spouse should take into consideration the needs and abilities of the other spouse. They should attempt to make each other happy, even if they have to compromise sometimes, and not simply be out to make sure that they are getting all of their rights in the marriage. Actually, it is usually the case that neither spouse is completely fulfilling the rights of the other and making the other happy. Hence, they both have to realize and accept their shortcomings.

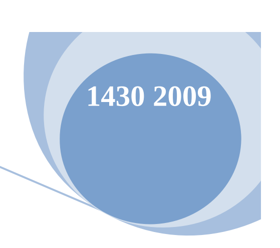
The Prophet (peace be upon him), in particular, advised the husbands to treat their wives in the best way— perhaps due to their greater authority or due to their greater strength, in general. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "The best of you is the one who is best to his family (wife) and I am the best of you to my family."[286] The Prophet (peace be upon him) also advised, "I advise you to treat women well for they have certainly been created from the upper part of the rib and the most crooked part of the rib is the upper part. If you then try to make it straight, you will break it off; if you leave it, it will remain crooked. So, I advise you to treat women well."[287]

Actually, both spouses, in general, fail to some extent in their fulfilling of the other's obligations. Hence, before criticizing the other or being harsh with the other due to some shortcoming, the person should look to himself and realize what wrong he himself is doing.

At the same time, though, Islamic Law has clearly laid down some rights and responsibilities so that both parties in the marriage know exactly what is expected of them and know what they need to fulfill to be a proper spouse. Thus, for example, Allah says, "And they [women] have rights [over their husbands] similar to those over them according to what is reasonable" (2:228).

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[286] Recorded by al-Tirmidhi and ibn Majah. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. See Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jaami*, hadith #3315.
[287] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



In sum, the rights of the wife or the obligations of the husband include, among others, the following:

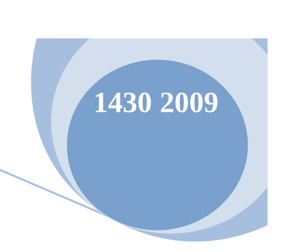
(1) Receiving her proper dower: Allah says, "And give the women their dower with a good heart; but if they, of their own good pleasure, remit any part of it to you, take it and enjoy it without fear of any harm" (4:4).

(2) Being fully and completely financially maintained by her husband: Allah says, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means" (4:34). Furthermore, in a hadith recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Prophet (peace be upon him) told Hind bint Utbah, when she complained that her husband (Abu Sufyan) was very stingy and was not maintaining her and she asked if she could take from his wealth without his knowledge, "Take what is sufficient for you and your child, according to what is customary."

(3) Being treated in a proper and kind manner: Allah states, "And consort with your wives in a goodly manner, for if you dislike them, it may well be that you dislike something which Allah might yet make a source of abundant good" (4:19).

(4) Having the right to sexual intercourse: In the *Sahih* of Ibn Hibban there is the following narration: The wife of Uthman ibn Madh'oon complained to the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) that her husband had no need for women. During the day, he would fast and at night, he would pray. The Prophet (peace be upon him) asked him, "Am I not the best example for you to follow?" He answered, "Certainly, may my father and mother be sacrificed for you." The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) then told him, "As for you, you pray during the night and you fast during the day. Certainly, your wife has a right upon you. And your body has a right upon you. So pray and sleep and fast and break your fast."

(5) Having the right to "privacy": Note the following hadith of the Prophet (peace be upon him): "Is there any man among you who goes to his wife, closes the door behind then, covers themselves and conceal themselves by Allah's concealing." They said, "Yes." He then said, "Then he sits after that



[with others] and he says, 'I did this and that.'" They were silent. He then turned to the women and said, "Do you any of you talk about such things?" They were also silent. Then a young girl came walking on her toes so the Prophet (peace be upon him) could see her and hear her and she said, "O Messenger of Allah, they [the men] certainly talk about it and they [the women] also talk about it." He said, "Do you know what they are like? They are like a female devil who met a devil in the street and they satisfied their desires with the people looking on."[288]

(6) The right to being taught or learning her religion.

On the other hand, the rights of the husband or the responsibilities of the women include:

(1) Being the head of the household: Allah has said, "Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means" (4:34). Although this is usually stated as a right of the husband, it is actually a heavy responsibility on his shoulders, as it means that he has the responsibility to guide his family and keep them along the straight path.

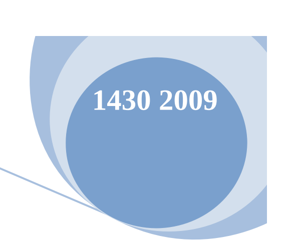
(2) Having the right to be obeyed: This goes with the first right. A person cannot be the head of something if he has no authority.

(3) Having his wife answer his call to meet his sexual needs: The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "If a man calls his wife to his bed and she refuses to come, the angels curse her until the morning."[289]

(4) That the wife will not allow anyone in his house except by his permission: In a hadith recorded in al-Bukhari and Muslim, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said, "Do not allow anyone into his house except by permission."

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[288] Recorded by Abu Dawud. According to al-Albani, it is *sahih*. See al-Albani, *Sahih al-Jaami*, hadith #7037.
[289] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



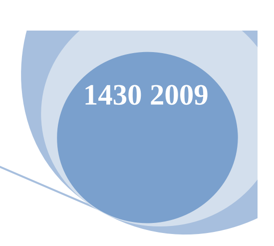
If the husband and wife enter into the marriage with the right intention of pleasing Allah and pleasing each other, recognizing their roles and responsibilities in the marriage and treating each other with proper Islamic behavior, Allah willing, their union will be a blessed union that will stretch from this life into the Hereafter.

Dissolution of a Marriage

Having said what was just said about marriage, Islam, though, is also a practical religion. It takes into consideration all possible common scenarios. It is possible for a man and woman to enter into a union with good intentions yet their personalities and likes simply do not coincide with one another. There are times in which a good marriage simply cannot be achieved and the spouses enter into a state of misery. Under such circumstances, Islamic law allows for an end to the marriage and their suffering.[290] The goal is to either stay together in a friendly manner or to separate in a goodly manner. Thus, for example, Allah says, "And when you have divorced women and they have fulfilled the term of their prescribed period, either take them back on reasonable basis or set them free on reasonable basis" (2:231). Allah also says, "Then when they are about to fulfill their term appointed [bringing an end to the divorce], either take them back in a good manner or part with them in a good manner" (65:2).

There are basically three ways in which a marriage is dissolved in Islamic Law. The first is *talaaq*, commonly translated as "divorce." This is a pronouncement of divorce made by the husband. After this pronouncement, the wife enters into a "waiting period" of approximately three months, during which time they may simply reunite as husband and wife. However, after the third pronouncement of *talaaq*, reunification during the waiting period is no longer permissible and the two must separate completely. A second form is known as *khul'*. This is where the wife is not satisfied in the marriage and offers something to the husband to release her from the marriage. For example, she may offer to return the dower in exchange to bringing an end to the marriage. A third form is where the rights of the wife are not being met by the husband and therefore she turns to a judge to bring an end to the marriage.

[290] Unfortunately, in some Muslim cultures today, divorce has become so "shameful" they have neglected this important guidance of Islamic Law, leading to spouses suffering in silence. This is definitively not the goal of Islamic Law concerning such issues.



Obviously, divorce is not a desired goal or a light matter. In a perfect world, all married couples would be in bliss. However, there are times in which this option is the best for all parties concerned.

(4) A Muslim vis-à-vis His/Her Children

Having a child is both a great blessing and a great responsibility. Allah has said, "Your wealth and your children are only a trial, whereas Allah—with Him is a great reward (Paradise)" (64:15). Allah also says, "O you who believe, guard yourselves and your families from the Hell-fire whose fuel is men and stones" (66:6). The meaning of this verse was reiterated by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) when he said, "All of you are shepherds and all of you will be asked about your wards... The man is responsible for his household and will be asked about his responsibilities. The wife will be asked about the house of her husband and her responsibilities."[291]

Muslim scholars consider that the rights of children appear long before they are even conceived via the selection of a pious and righteous spouse. This will be the first step in providing a good household and environment for the child.

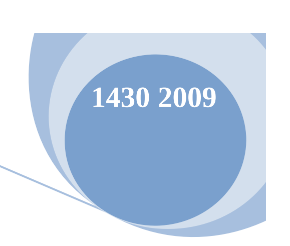
Beyond that, the most important rights of the child include: (a) being maintained and provided for in a healthy manner; (b) being taught the tenets of the religion; (3) being treated with compassion and mercy; (4) being just among multiple siblings; and (5) having a good example set for them by their parents.

(5) A Muslim vis-à-vis His/Her Neighbors

Allah says in the Quran, "Worship Allah and join none with Him in worship, and do good to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, the poor, the neighbor who is near of kin, the neighbor who is a stranger, the companion by your side, the wayfarer (you meet), and those (slaves) whom your right hands possess. Verily, Allah does not like such as are proud and boastful" (4:36).

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[291] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.



Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should speak good things or keep silent. Whoever believes in Allah and the Last Day should be courteous and generous to his neighbor."[292]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said, "Gabriel kept advising me concerning the neighbor to the point that I thought he would inherit [from his neighbor]."[293]

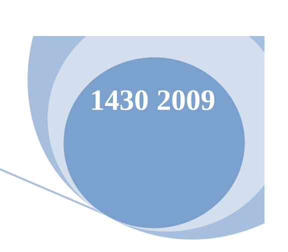
In another hadith, the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "By Allah, he is not a believer. By Allah, he is not a believer. By Allah, he is not a believer." It was said to him, "Who is that, O Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him)?" He said, "The one from whose affairs his neighbor is not safe."[294]

One time the Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked about a woman who performed lots of prayers, fasted and gave charity but she used to harm her neighbor by her speech. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said that she is in the Hell-fire. Then the Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked about a woman who did not fast, pray or give in charity much [more than what was obligatory upon her] but she would not harm her neighbors. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said that she is in Paradise.[295]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also demonstrated specific ways by which one is generous or courteous to his neighbor. The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) once said to Abu Dharr, "O Abu Dharr, when you prepare stew, increase its water and deliver it to some of your neighbors."[296]

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[292] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[293] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[294] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[295] This hadith was recorded by Ahmad, ibn Maajah and al-Haakim. Ali Hasan al-Halabi states that its chain is *sahih*. Ali Hasan Abdul Hameed, *Huqooq al-Jaar fi Saheeh al-Sunnah wa al-Athaar* (Amman, Jordan: al-Maktaba al-Islaamiya, 1993), p. 31. This hadith is sometimes misused. Obviously, the second woman fulfilled her requirement of prayer, fasting and so forth but she did little voluntary deeds of that nature. There are people today who do not even perform the five daily prayers and they claim to be better than those who do pray just because they are good to their neighbors or others. What they claim for themselves cannot be concluded from this hadith.
[296] Recorded by Muslim.



Being courteous and generous to one's neighbor includes helping him when they need assistance, visiting them when they are ill and general checking on their welfare. Abu Bakr al-Jazairi wrote,

One should demonstrate goodness towards one's neighbor by: helping them when they seek help, assisting them if they seek assistance, visiting them when they fall ill, congratulating them if something pleasing occurs to them, giving them condolences upon afflictions, helping them if they are in need, being the first to greet them, being kind in speech to them, being gentle in one's speech to the neighbor's children, guiding them to what is best for their religion and worldly life, overlooking their mistakes, not attempting to look into their private matters, not constraining them with one's building or renovations or along the walkway, and not harming them by letting one's trash onto their property or in front of their household. All of those actions form part of the goodness that one is ordered to perform in Allah's command [in the verse to be quoted shortly].[297]

Living in non-Muslim environments, it is very important to recognize that the scholars have concluded that there are three types of neighbors: (a) a neighbor who is also a relative and a Muslim. This type of neighbor has three types of rights over the person (that of being a neighbor, a relative and a brother Muslim). (b) a neighbor who is not a relative but is a Muslim. This neighbor has two types of rights over the person. (c) a neighbor who is neither a relative nor a Muslim. This neighbor only has the right of a neighbor.[298] Thus, even if a neighbor is a non-Muslim, that person has the right to a special relationship by virtue of being a neighbor.

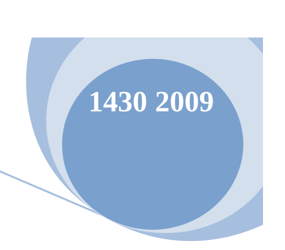
The Permanent Committee for Scientific Research, Saudi Arabia, was asked about dealing with non-Muslim neighbors (accepting gifts from them and so on) and they stated in response:

Response: One should treat well those who treat him well from among them, even if he be a Christian. If they give you a permissible gift, you should respond in kind. The Prophet (peace be upon him) accepted a gift from the

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[297] Abu Bakr al-Jazaairi, *Minhaaj al-Muslim* (Beirut: Daar al-Fikr, 1992), p. 107.

[298] See Muhammad ibn Uthaimeen, *Sharh Riyaadh al-Saaliheen* (Riyadh: Daar al-Watan, 1995), vol. 5, p. 205.



leader of the Romans who was a Christian. He also accepted a gift from a Jew. Allah says in the Quran, "Allah forbids you not to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and drove you not from your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity. It is only as regards those who fought against you on account of religion, and have driven you out of your homes, and helped to drive you out, Allah forbids you to befriend them. And whoever befriends them are the wrongdoers" (60:8-9).[299]

Ibn Uthaimeen also stated, "There is no harm in meeting the needs of a disbeliever if it does not contain any action which is forbidden as the neighbors have rights upon one another and this might even be a reason for him to accept Islam."[300] Ibn Baaz also said, "[The Muslim] must be neighborly toward his non-Muslim neighbor. If your neighbor is good to you, you do not harm him and you may even give him charity if he is poor or give him a gift if he is rich. You may also advise him concerning what is good for him. All of this may lead him to want to learn about Islam and become a Muslim and because neighbors have very great rights."[301]

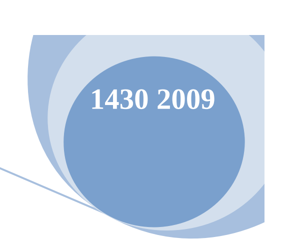
The spirit of neighborliness is something that has been lost in many cultures in the hustle and bustle of contemporary civilization. It would be excellent if Muslims, new converts or long-time Muslims, could revive this spirit and revive part of the religion of Islam.

(6) A Muslim vis-à-vis Other Muslims

If one were to ask many today as to what the strongest bond there could possibly be among people, most of them would probably answer something like blood relationship, ethnic origin, nationality and so forth. Actually, the Quran shows that these types of bonds are not that strong if the foundation behind them is weak. In the Quran, Allah gives the examples of Cain and Abel, who were two brothers yet one killed the other, as well as the example of the brethren of Joseph, who cast Joseph into a well. Those were all blood relatives; however, they put this world above their relationship with others. Such is occurring today throughout the world. The ties between the people are subser-

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[299] Ali Abu Lauz, *Answers*, pp. 32-33.
[300] Ali Abu Lauz, *Answers*, p. 32.
[301] Ali Abu Lauz, *Answers*, pp. 30-31.



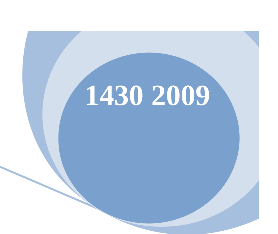
vient to their desires, goals and wants of this world. Many individuals are quickly and easily willing to sell out their own kith and kin to get ahead in this world or to get something they want in this world.

All of this demonstrates one thing: When the ties between people are based on worldly considerations, even if they are originally blood ties, then those ties are given up when the worldly considerations so demand them to be given up. Hence, those are not the strongest ties that can be built among people. The strongest ties that can achieved between people are the ties of Islam and true faith. These are the bonds forged between people that are solely the result of their belief in Allah and their love for Allah. This was clearly pointed out by Allah in the Quran when Allah stated, "And He has united their (believers') hearts. If you had spent all that is in the earth, you could not have united their hearts, but Allah has united them. Certainly, He is All-Mighty, All-Wise" (8:63). Allah also says, "And hold fast, all of you together, to the Rope of Allah, and be not divided among yourselves, and remember Allah's favor on you, for you were enemies and He joined your hearts together, so that by His grace, you became brethren and you were on a brink of a Pit of Fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah makes clear His signs to you, that you may be guided" (3:103). The Quran and the Sunnah show that the bond of faith is the strongest of all bonds. It represents humans from all over the world coming together for one purpose only: to establish the worship of Allah alone. To achieve that goal, Muslims work together and help one another in compassion mercy and love.

There are actually numerous texts of the Quran and hadith that demonstrate beyond any doubt that Muslims are to form one universal, international brotherhood and sisterhood.[302] For the sake of brevity, only a few examples of those texts will be presented here:

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[302] It is important to realize that this brotherhood is founded upon a common faith. In fact, blood relationships come to an end because of differences in religion. Allah says about Noah and his son, "[Noah said,] 'O my Lord, verily my son is of my family! And certainly your promise is true, and You are the Most Just of the judges.' He [Allah] said, 'O Noah! Surely he is not of your family, his work is unrighteous'" (11:45-46). Hence, non-Muslims fall outside of the fold of this brotherhood. They are more than welcome to join this brotherhood by embracing Islam, as this brotherhood is not based on race, ethnicity or nationality. Otherwise, by their choice of religion and belief they have opted to remain outside of this brotherhood. As shall be discussed later, the Muslim still has some obligations toward such non-Muslims though.



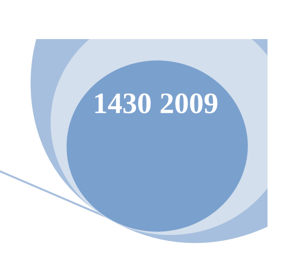
Allah says, "The believers, men and women, are *auliyaa* (helpers, supporters, friends, protectors) of one another, they enjoin what is good and eradicate what is evil. They offer the prayers and pay the Zakat and obey Allah and His Messenger. Surely, Allah will have His Mercy on them. Surely, Allah is All-Mighty, All-Wise" (9:71). Another verse reads, "The believers are nothing else but brothers" (49:10). Allah also says, "Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are severe against disbelievers and merciful among themselves" (48:29). The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "The believer with respect to another believer is like a building, one portion strengthening the other."[303] Another hadith states, "The parable of the believers with respect to their love, mercy and compassion for one another is like that of the body: if one of its limbs is hurting, the remainder of the body is afflicted by sleeplessness and fever."[304]

But this great brotherhood of Islam is not something theoretical. It is, in fact, well defined. It has certain basic components to it and specific rights and obligations that are spelled out in the Quran and Sunnah. These rights and obligations are due to every Muslim, of every time and place.

One of the necessary aspects of this brotherhood is love. That is, it is an obligation upon all Muslims to love their brother Muslims. In fact, they should love them in a manner similar to the way they care for themselves. As the Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "None of you truly believes until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself."[305]

A second necessary aspect of this brotherhood is mutual support, aid and assistance. When his brother is being oppressed or wronged, he comes to his aid and assistance with his wealth and soul, if possible. This is described, for example, in the following verses: "And what is wrong with you that you fight not in the Cause of Allah, and for those weak, ill-treated and oppressed among men, women and children, whose cry is, 'Our Lord! Rescue us from this town whose people are oppressors, and raise for us from You one who will protect, and raise for us from You one who will help'" (4:75).

[303] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[304] Recorded by Muslim.
[305] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.



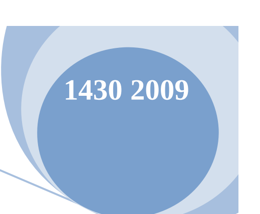
A third essential aspect of this Islamic brotherhood is mercy and tenderness between the believers. This goes beyond a simple love for one another but it means that each brother feels in his heart for what his brother is going through. The Prophet (peace be upon him) described the Muslims in the following fashion, "The similitude of believers in regard to mutual love, affection, fellow-feeling is that of a body; when any limb of it aches, the whole body aches due to fever and sleeplessness."[306]

A final necessary component of our brotherhood is common acts of courtesy. True brotherhood has to be put into practice; it cannot simply be a statement of the tongue. One amazing and beautiful aspect of Islam is that it does not leave matters at a hypothetical level with each individual attempting to figure out how goals can possibly be achieved. Thus, for example, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) has detailed specific acts that one has the right to expect from one's brother and which one should also perform towards one's brother. Thus, among those common obligatory acts of courtesy are the six mentioned by the Prophet (peace be upon him): "Six are the rights of a Muslim over another Muslim.... When you meet him, offer him greetings; when he invites you to a feast, accept it; when he seeks your sincere counsel, give it to him; when he sneezes and says, '*al-hamdulillah*,' say, 'May Allah show mercy to you'; when he falls ill, visit him; and when he dies, follow his funeral bier."[307]

Beyond these six well-known practices, Islamic Law guides Muslims to many other practices that help gender love and closeness between the believers, which is an obvious goal of the Law itself. Thus, for example, if a Muslim loves another Muslim for the sake of Allah, he should inform the other individual of that feeling. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained the reason for doing so when he said, "If one of you loves his brother for the sake of Allah, he should inform of that as this will make the bond longer lasting and the love more confirmed."[308]

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[306] Recorded by Muslim.
[307] Recorded by Muslim.
[308] Recorded by ibn Abi Dunya in *Kitaab al-Ikhwaan*. According to al-Albaani, it is a good narration. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* #280.



The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, "By the One in whose hand is my soul, you will not enter Paradise until you believe. And you do not believe until you love one another. Certainly, let me inform you of that which will establish such for you: spreading peace among yourselves."[309] This hadith could mean the spreading of the greetings of peace or doing actual deeds that bring about peace and togetherness.

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also noted the importance of giving gifts to one another. He said, "Exchange gifts and you will love one another."[310]

The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also encouraged Muslims to visit one another. He stated, "Visit one another occasionally and love [between you] will increase."[311]

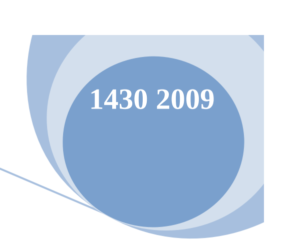
In addition to all of these positive acts, when one avoids the forbidden acts, the results will also be positive for interpersonal relationships. In other words, when one avoids backbiting, slandering, lying, cheating, spying and so forth, nothing but good will result from the avoidance of these evil practices that Islam has clearly forbidden.

In sum, if Islam is truly applied, a Muslim will be a brother/sister to all the Muslims in the world and would do nothing but good toward them and would expect nothing but good in return from them.

(7) A Muslim vis-à-vis Non-Muslims

Obviously, Muslims and non-Muslims are following very different paths. A Muslim's life revolves entirely around the proper belief in God. A Muslim's attitude toward others is likewise determined by the other's attitude toward God. A Muslim could not possibly feel complete affinity and love toward someone who has turned his back on God, refuses to submit to God or ridicule

[309] Recorded by Muslim.
[310] According to al-Albaani, it is a good narration. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* #3004.
[311] Recorded by al-Tabaraani. According to al-Albaani, it is an authentic narration. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* #2583.



belief in God. It is simply not natural for there to be complete love between two such people.[312] However, even given this possible negative feeling in the heart, a Muslim must deal with non-Muslims on the basis of just principles. This applies to all non-Muslims—many non-Muslims are not antagonistic at all toward Muslims while others exhibit clear and unequivocal scorn and hatred toward Muslims.[313]

One of the basic principles of behavior toward non-belligerent, non-Muslims is found in the following verse of the Quran: "Allah forbids you not to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity" (60:8)

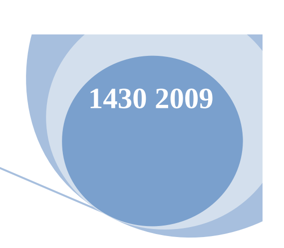
Additionally, a Muslim has very clear responsibilities towards non-Muslims.

First, he must call them to the way of Allah. It is part of a believer's attempt to bring good to all people and to the world as a whole that he thereby actively calls other people to Islam.[314] The desire to see others know and worship Allah fills the heart of the true believer. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), of course, set the best example. Allah describes in more than one place in the Quran how the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be

[312] This fact is true for secularists as well. Many of those on the left side of the political scale feel true scorn and enmity toward those on the right, and vice-versa.

[313] There are times in which Islamic states may go to war with non-Muslim states. Such conditions of belligerency are not uncommon in the history of humankind and do not necessarily imply the impossibility of some cooperation in the future. In fact, European states constantly fought each other, sometimes for a hundred years' time, and yet today they all belong to the European Union. A state of belligerency will affect the relationship between such Muslims and non-Muslims. However, that is not the normal case in the world today. Thus, a discussion of those cases is beyond the scope of this work.

[314] This is not based on an evil intent in the heart of the Muslim, as some contemporaries try to distort the issue. In fact, a Muslim would never try to force another person to become a Muslim. Christians speak about spreading Christianity throughout the Muslim world and yet virtually no one in the West takes this as a negative statement. In fact, many today are trying to spread democracy throughout the world because they believe in the inherent goodness of democracy. God alone knows how such people would react if the Muslims of today were to try to impose Islam on non-Muslims in the way that some of these people are trying to impose "democracy" on the Muslims.



upon him) grieved over the fact that many refused to become believers. Allah says, for example, "Perhaps, you, would kill yourself (O Muhammad) in grief, over their footsteps (for their turning away from you), because they believe not in this narration (the Quran)" (18:6).

In fact, although the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) suffered so much harm from the disbelievers of Makkah, when the angel came to him to give him the option of bringing the mountains of Makkah down upon those people, the Prophet refused the offer and said, "I hope that from their descendants there will come a people who will worship Allah alone while not ascribe any partners to Him."[315] Calling to the religion of Allah is truly the path of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and the path of the believers. Allah says, "Say (O Muhammad): 'This is my way; I invite unto Allah with sure knowledge, I and whosoever follows me (also must invite others to Allah) with sure knowledge'" (12:108). This is truly the greatest and best good deed that one could do toward his fellow citizen.

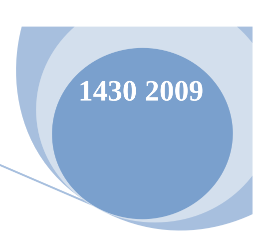
A second obligation toward disbelievers is proper and just treatment. This is described by Shaikh ibn Baaz who said, "[the Muslim] may not wrong the other person with respect to his life, wealth or honor, if the non-Muslim is a citizen of the Islamic state or has attained other protection. He must fulfill the other's rights. He may not wrong him with respect to his wealth by stealing from him, deceiving him or cheating him. He cannot harm him in his body by beating or killing him. His protection from the state guarantees his safety from such things."[316]

A Muslim can interact with non-Muslims, buying, selling or renting from them, for example.[317] Even on a social level, there can be interaction, such as coming together for meals and the like. However, such interactions are, by nature, going to be limited. The different views of reality between a Muslim and a non-Muslim easily leads to disagreements. On a religious level, there is

[315] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[316] Ali Abu Lauz, *Answers*, p. 30.

[317] Issues concerning non-Muslim relatives or non-Muslim neighbors have already been touched upon.



definitely going to be a feeling of discontent or disappointment with people of other faiths.[318]

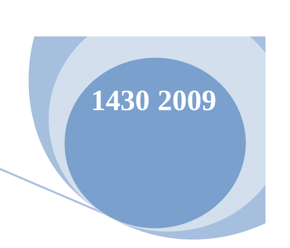
However, in addition, the differences in a Muslim's outlook and actions are going to prevent him from truly participating and being close friends with non-Muslims. A Muslim, for example, does not drink alcohol and does not wish to be around people when they are drinking alcohol, not to speak of drugs and other activities. A Muslim must be very restrictive and cautious in his or her interaction with the opposite sex, which creates barriers for social interaction. Even among members of the same sex, a Muslim does not engage in inappropriate speech about members of the opposite sex, a very common practice in social settings these days. Perhaps one could say that the Muslim's ultimate goal in his relations with non-Muslims is to bring them to Islam, thereby opening the door for there to be a complete relationship of love and brotherhood between them. Even if the non-Muslim is antagonistic and impolite, the Muslim knows that he should repel his evil with goodness. Allah says, "The good deed and the evil deed cannot be equal. Repel [the evil] with [a deed] that is better. [If you do that] then verily he, between whom and you there was enmity, (will become) as though he was a close friend" (41:34).

In sum, as ibn Baaz wrote,

It is obligatory upon Muslims to deal with disbelievers in an Islamic fashion with proper behavior, as long as they are not fighting the Muslims. One must fulfill one's trusts to them, must not deceive them, must not betray them or lie to them. If there is a discussion or debate between them, one must argue with them in the best manner and be just with them in the dispute. This is

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[318] Allah has stated, "O believers! Take not My enemies and your enemies as friends, showing affection towards them, while they have disbelieved in what has come to you of the Truth" (60:1).This author comes from a non-Muslim background and has mixed with many non-Muslims in the past. It is not uncommon for many religious groups to have disdain towards people of other religions. However, the only ones who seem to be very open and honest concerning this situation and how it is supposed to be dealt with are the Muslims. Most other religious groups conceal their dislike for others under some banner of "love." One notable exception is Rus Walton who wrote in a book entitled, *One Nation Under God*, "Our Savior and our King instructs us to love our enemies. Yes! But nowhere in Scripture, nowhere, does the Lord God tell us to love His enemies or to make covenant with them in any way." Quoted in Andrew J. Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 130.



in obedience to Allah's command, "And argue not with the People of the Scriptures (Jews and Christians) unless it be in a way that is better, except with such of them as do wrong" (29:46). It is sanctioned for the Muslim to invite them to the good, to advise them and to be patient with them at the same time being neighborly and polite with them. This is so because Allah has stated, "Invite to the way of your Lord with wisdom (of the Quran) and fair preaching, and argue with them in a way that is better" (16:125). Allah has also said, "Speak good to people" (2:83).[319]

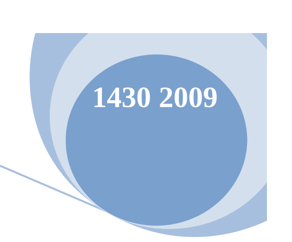
Finally, a Muslim may even give charity to non-Muslims. The Permanent Committee of Islamic Research (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia) has stated,

It is permissible for a Muslim to assist his non-Muslim neighbor by giving him some meat from his sacrificed animal… It is allowed for us to give food to the disbelievers living under the Islamic state and wayfarers from the meat of the sacrificed animal. It is allowed to give to them on the basis of their poverty, blood relation, being a neighbor or to soften their hearts… However, one should not give such meet to a *harbi* (someone who is fighting against the Muslim state) because in their case, the obligation is to suppress and weaken them and not assist or strengthen them with charity. In fact, that is the ruling with respect to all forms of voluntary charity, based on the generality of the verse in the Quran, "Allah forbids you not to deal justly and kindly with those who fought not against you on account of religion and drove you not out from your homes. Verily, Allah loves those who deal with equity" (60:8). Furthermore, the Prophet (peace be upon him) ordered Asma bint Abu Bakr (may Allah be pleased with her) to help her mother out with money although she was a polytheist.[320]

(8) A Muslim vis-à-vis Society as a Whole

When a Muslim accepts to live in a certain society, he is, in essence, making a pact that with that country that he will abide by the laws of that state. He does not have the right to violate the laws of that state simply because he is a Muslim and the state is not an Islamic state. Thus, all of the prin-

[319] Ali Abu Lauz, *Answers*, p. 42.
[320] Ali Abu Lauz, *Answers*, p. 47-48.

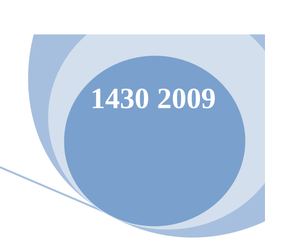


ciples of proper behavior that have been described in this chapter apply to a Muslim living wherever he may be living. In most countries today, many things may be legal that are forbidden to a Muslim. These legal things a Muslim simply avoids. He should also demand his legal rights to ensure that he is not forced to do anything forbidden in Islam. Overall though, he should be from among the law-abiding citizens.

In addition to that, a Muslim should be a plus for any society he is living in. He should be a model citizen in many ways. As described earlier, he should be a good neighbor. He has the obligation to encourage what is good and prevent evil wherever he may be living. In addition, he must avoid and oppose what most societies see as the greatest crimes, such as murder, robbery, extortion and so forth. Furthermore, he must steer clear of alcohol or drug use, thus not burdening society as a whole with his personal weaknesses and addictions. Finally, he must be just and fair in all of his dealings with the other members of society.

Even though Muslims should play a positive role in any society, in many countries of the West today, a Muslim's loyalty and patriotism is being questioned. Obviously, a Muslim is not going to have the same feelings towards a secular government as he would toward a Muslim government. That, however, does not mean that he is going to work against his government or seek to harm the country he is living in. Undoubtedly, many a Jew will feel more loyalty to Israel than to their own home country. In fact, the recent debates in the United States demonstrate that many Christian groups are displeased with their government (and with the Supreme Court in particular). Many a Democrat in the United States, for example, does not feel complete loyalty for Republican administrations and vice-versa. However, no one seems to be questioning their loyalty and patriotism.

If patriotism means to simply follow and support what one's government is saying and be gung-ho in such blind allegiance, no intelligent person would be patriotic as all governments are known to lie and deceive at one time or another. On the other hand, if patriotism means to wish what is best for one's country, then the problem is that everyone differs as to what they see is best for their country. Some feel that they have the right to speak on behalf of all, but their "right" to do so may be questioned.



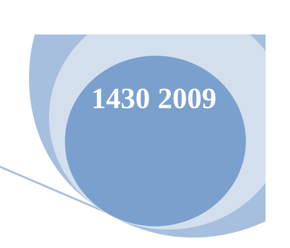
Islam recognizes the fact that it is natural for an individual to love his country and to have an affinity for that land in which he grew up. When the Muslims were forced to migrate from Makkah, which was under the control of the polytheists, many of them expressed their love for Makkah. Hence, it is natural for Muslims to develop a love for whatever land they happen to be in, even if the country is not an Islamic state. It is also natural for Muslims to desire what is best for their homeland.

But, again, unfortunately, their idea as to what is best may not be shared or appreciated by others. For example, the Muslims may wish to see an end to gambling, prostitution and pornography. The Muslims believe that this is what is best for all the people concerned, Muslims as well as non-Muslims. However, many non-Muslims will not share this feeling. Therein lies the crux of the problem. Theoretically speaking, though, in contemporary "free" societies, this should not be a problem. Muslims should be able to hold on to their values and customs—without bringing harm to others—while the others follow the dominant culture in non-Muslim lands. If the "free" countries are not willing to give the Muslims that much, it means that they are not willing to live up to their own ideals. It is not that Muslims are trying to cause them harm, they are simply trying to be good citizens while living a different lifestyle than the dominant culture.[321]

(9) A Muslim vis-à-vis Wealth and Property

In Islam, wealth is not considered an evil. Wealth is a bounty that Allah bestows upon individuals. It is definitely not evil nor even a necessary evil, as

[321] With respect to warfare, in general, Muslims today should be pacifists and conscientious objectors. The only type of fighting sanctioned in Islamic Law is fighting on behalf of an Islamic State or clear self-defense. In the absence of those two, Muslims should not engage in warfare. This author will not even bother to touch upon the question of terrorism. Enough Muslim scholars have already denounced terrorism and have shown that it has no place in Muslim behavior. Unfortunately, though, the non-Muslim media does not seem very interested in presenting a full picture of the attitude of Muslim scholars, preferring, it seems, to blame Muslims for not coming out strongly against terrorism. This author attended a conference in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (April 20-22, 2004) entitled, "The Stand of Islam on Terrorism, Violence & Extremism." Had this same conference been held in the Vatican and had been about Christianity's view of those topics, the conference findings would have probably been assailed and praised for months if not years to come. However, although participants came from all over the world, barely a mention was made of the Conference (if any mention were made) in the international media.



some other religions teach. In fact, protecting and safeguarding wealth is one of the goals of the Sharee'ah. Hence, people are encouraged to engage in earning a livelihood and accumulating wealth.

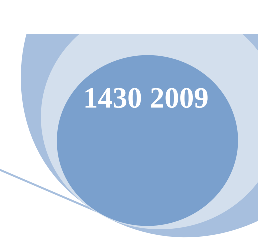
However, like many good things, there has to be limits with respect to wealth. In the hands of a righteous person, wealth becomes a tool that can be used to please Allah. On the other hand, it can also be something that may lead to a person's own destruction. Hence, it is truly a kind of trial from God. Allah describes it in this manner, "Your wealth and your children are only a trial" (64:15). The Prophet said, "The two feet of the human will not move on the Day of Resurrection until he is asked about his life and he how he used it, about his knowledge and what he did with it, about his wealth and how he acquired it and how he spent it…"[322] For example, one cannot give wealth priority over the teachings of the faith. Wealth or money cannot, thus, become one's ultimate goal in life. Additionally, wealth must be acquired by permissible means and spent on permissible matters. The ethical standards of Islam must be adhered to and, as a result, the wealth may be blessed by Allah, benefiting the individual in both this life and the Hereafter.

The righteous person understands that the wealth under his control actually belongs to Allah and the human's ownership of wealth is more akin to that of a caretaker. In other words, the human must use wealth only in the manner approved of by the true owner of that wealth, Allah. The Muslim understands that he is not free, therefore, to use his money in any fashion that he wishes. There are some things that are clearly and obviously forbidden for him. For example, he cannot use his money to bribe others or wrong others, thus going against justice. Allah says, "And eat up not one another's property unjustly, nor give bribery to the rulers (judges before presenting your cases) that you may knowingly eat up a part of the property of others sinfully" (2:188).

Ethics and Business Dealings in Islam

Business dealings in Islam are not simply a matter of getting ahead in this world. They are not cutthroat competition or taking advantage of others.

[322] Recorded by al-Tirmidhi and al-Daarimi.



Instead, they are based on a very strong ethical basis. A Muslim realizes that every business transaction is a question of morals and ethics.

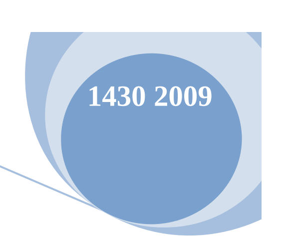
Business transactions are an essential aspect of any developed society. The Prophet (peace be upon him) gave a great deal of guidance concerning business transactions. Muslims must heed this guidance. This guidance will, Allah willing, go a great way in removing many problems and feelings of hatred that are the result of unjust or improper business practices. Furthermore, the feeling of brotherhood— loving for one's brother what one loves for oneself— should permeate all business transactions. How can brothers be considered true brothers to one another when they are willing to cheat each other or lie to each other simply for the sake of the dollar?

Thus, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated in a hadith that stresses both brotherhood and fair business practices: "Do not be envious of one another; do not artificially raise prices against one another; do not hate one another; do not turn one's back on each other; and do not undercut one another in business transactions. And be, [O] servants of Allah, brethren. A Muslim is the brother of a Muslim. He does not wrong him. He does not fail him [when he needs him]. He does not lie to him. And he does not show contempt for him. Piety is here"— and he pointed to his chest three times. "It is enough of evil for a person to hold his brother Muslim in contempt. All of a Muslim is inviolable to another Muslim: his blood, his wealth and his honor."[323]

The Prophet (peace be upon him) also said, "May Allah have mercy on the one who is easy-going and generous while buying, while selling and when demanding his rights."[324]

In fact, the key to blessed business transactions, in which both parties please Allah and receive blessings, is honesty and straightforwardness. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "The buyer and seller have the right of option as long as they do not part from one another. If they were honest and

[323] Recorded by Muslim.
[324] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



clear, they would be blessed in their transaction. If they concealed facts and lied, the blessings of their transaction would be destroyed."[325]

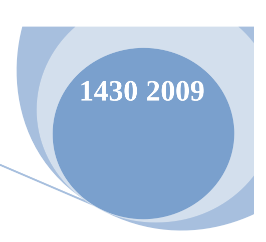
If a person is ethical and morally conscious in his business dealings, this is a good sign that he is preferring the Hereafter to this world. He is not willing to risk Allah's punishment and anger for a measly gain. He is also strengthening the trust among the Muslim brethren. Allah willing, his reward with Allah will be great.

A general principle with respect to business transactions is that they must be the result of the mutual consent or approval of the contracting parties: Allah says, "O you who believe! Eat not up your property among yourselves unjustly except it be a trade amongst you, by mutual consent" (4:29). During the Farewell Pilgrimage, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also announced, "The wealth of a person is not permissible except through willing consent."[326] In other words, no one can be coerced into giving up part of his wealth or entering into a business dealing. Such coercion is illegal and would void the contract. At the same time, the Muslim is free to enter into any business transaction that does not violate Islamic law. In general, he is a "free actor," neither compelled by the state nor any other force. In this sense, the Islamic economic system has some characteristics in common with free market capitalism.

Another general principle with respect to business transactions is that they are permissible unless there is evidence to demonstrate that they are forbidden; only if it is found that it contains some forbidden aspect will it be deemed forbidden. Thus, Islamic Law has laid down some principle guidelines while delineating particular forbidden aspects that must be avoided. The matters that should be avoided include unstated or undetermined terms, speculative or overly risky conditions, interest, gambling and fraud or deception. If any one of these factors is found in a contract, the contract, depending on the extent to which they are present, may be rendered null, void and impermissible. It is essential that Muslims be aware of these forbidden characteristics so

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[325] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[326] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.



that they may live off of pure and permissible sources. Thus, some of them are discussed in some detail below.

The Aspect of *Gharar*

Gharar refers to speculative or overly risky transactions. Imam Muslim records in his *Sahih*: "On the authority of Abu Hurairah who said that the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) forbade 'sales of speculative nature' (*bai' al-gharar*)." Al-Bukhari and Muslim record: "On the authority of ibn Umar who said that 'the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) prohibited the sale of fruits until their ripeness and freedom from disease were apparent. He prohibited both the seller and the buyer.'" Commenting on a hadith with similar meaning, al-Nawawi explained why the prohibition was for both the seller and the buyer. He wrote, "As for the seller, it is because he is wanting to devour wealth wrongfully. As for the buyer, it is because he is in accord with him on this forbidden act and because he is [possibly] wasting his wealth while wasting wealth has been prohibited."[327]

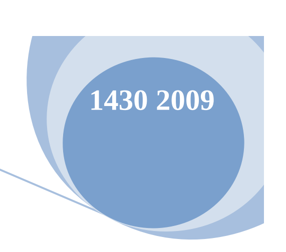
From these hadith and others, there is a consensus among jurists that an overwhelming presence of undue risk or uncertainty renders a business contract null and void. Such transactions are ones in which the probability of one or both of the parties being wronged is great. Concerning the meaning of this concept of *gharar*, Rayner states,

The Sharee'ah determined that in the interests of fair, ethical dealing in commutative contracts, unjustified enrichment should be prohibited. This policy precludes any element of uncertainty or risk (*Gharar*).[328] In a general context, the unanimous proposition of the jurists held that in any transaction, by failing or neglecting to define any of the essential pillars of contract relating to the consideration or the object, the parties undertake a risk which is not indis-

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[327] Yahya al-Nawawi, *al-Minhaaj Sharh Saheeh Muslim ibn a-Hajjaaj* (Beirut: Daar al-Ma'rifah, 1999), vol. 10, p. 424.

[328] The statement, "any element of uncertainty or risk," is not quite correct. The Muslim jurists have long recognized that amounts of "uncertainty" or "risk" exist in many legal contracts. The true question, as much of Rayner's quote itself further shows, is the predominance or the effect of such "uncertainty" or "risk" on the essence of the contract.



pensable for them. This kind of risk was deemed unacceptable and tantamount to speculation due to its inherent uncertainty. Speculative transactions with these characteristics are therefore prohibited...[329]

Although such contracts are prohibited by Islamic Law, due to their speculative or risky nature and hence the possibility of making gains from such transactions, they can be very alluring to individuals.[330] Thus, ibn al-Atheer, going back to the lexical meaning of the term, says, "*Al-Gharar* is that concerning which its apparent component is preferable but its non-apparent component is disliked to the person. Hence, its apparent component entices the buyer while its non-apparent component is unknown."[331]

According to ibn Juzay, examples of *gharar* transactions include:

(1) "Ignorance of the price and uncertainty about the existence of the object."[332]

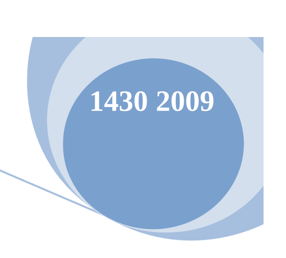
(2) "Uncertainty about the price of the object and about its characteristics, as in the example of the sale of cloth in a shop without any specification about its quality or price."[333]

(3) "Uncertainty related to difficulties of delivery."[334]

(4) "Uncertainty about the existence of the object, as in the case of a sickly animal."[335]

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[329] S. E. Rayner, *The Theory of Contracts in Islamic Law* (London: Graham & Trotman, 1991), p. 289.
[330] Both parties must enter into contacts out of free will. However, that does not mean that every contract in which parties are willing to enter is permissible.
[331] Mubaarak ibn al-Atheer, *Jaami al-Usool fi Ahaadeeth al-Rasool* (Maktaba al-Hilwaani. 1971), vol. 1, pp. 527-528.
[332] Nayla Comair-Obeid, *The Law of Business Contracts in the Arab Middle East* (London: Kluwer Law International, 1996), p. 58.
[333] Ibid., p. 58.
[334] Ibid., p. 58.
[335] Ibid., p. 58.



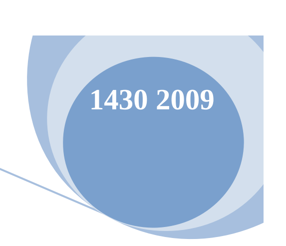
The Aspect of *Riba* (Interest)

One of the well-known great sins is the taking or paying of *riba* (interest).[336] Indeed, any Muslim familiar with the numerous texts censuring *riba* would undoubtedly do his best to avoid any trace of *riba*. For example, Allah has said in the Quran, "Those who devour interest will not stand [on the Day of Judgment] save as he arises whom the devil has deranged by (his) touch. That is because they say, 'Trade is just like interest,' whereas Allah has permitted trading and has forbidden interest. He unto whom an admonition from his Lord comes, and (he) refrains (in obedience thereto), shall keep [the money of] that which is past, and his affair (henceforth) is with Allah. As for him who returns (to interest), such are rightful owners of the Fire. They will abide therein forever. Allah destroys interest and gives an increase for charity. Allah loves not every disbelieving, sinner. Truly, [as for] those who believe, perform righteous deeds, establish the prayer and pay the Zakat, their reward is with their Lord. No fear shall come upon them neither shall they grieve. O you who believe! Observe your duty to Allah, and give up what remains (due to you) in interest, if you are (in truth) believers. And if you do not, then be informed of a war from Allah and His messenger. But if you repent, then you have your principal [without interest]. Do not wrong [others] and you shall not be wronged" (*al-Baqarah* 275-279).

Among the other numerous Quranic and hadith texts concerning interest is the following: Jaabir stated, "The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) cursed the taker of interest, its giver, its recorder and its two witnesses. They are all alike."[337] In this important hadith of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) one sees that the giver and the receiver as well as those who assisted in this forbidden contract are all equally sinful and have all been cursed by the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

[336] The word *riba* is sometimes very poorly and improperly translated into English as "usury." "Usury" implies an exorbitant amount of interest, above and beyond what is permissible by law. In Islamic law, any increase above the principle is forbidden. Hence, any positive rate of interest, no matter how low, is both interest and usury in Islamic law. Hence, the word interest is a much better translation for the word *riba*.

[337] Recorded by Muslim.



Thus, it is forbidden to pay interest or to receive interest, and this includes the interest that one earns on one's checking or savings account. In general, if an individual wishes to loan money to another individual who is in need, this act should be a brotherly and charitable act and there should be no thought of reaping monetary benefits in such a case. If someone wishes to make a "business loan," hoping to reap profits, then he should be willing to put his risk and not demand a guaranteed return for his money. It is not fair that the borrower is at risk in his business venture while the lender faces no risk at all.

At the same time, Islam opens the door to many avenues by which injustice is avoided while investment still takes place. Hence, profit-sharing agreements on business loans are allowed while fixed interest payments are not.

Fraud and Deception

Fraud and deception are also forbidden in Islam. This would include intentionally concealing defects in one's merchandise or work. One time the Prophet (peace be upon him) was in the marketplace and he put his hand into a pile of grains and he found that it was wet on the bottom. He asked the vendor about it and the man told him that rain had fallen upon it. So the Prophet (peace be upon him) told him, "Why did you not put it on top of the grain so people could see it? Whoever deceives is not from me."[338]

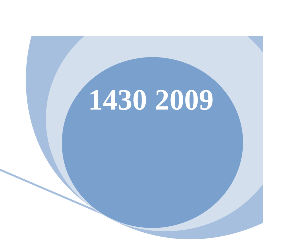
Ibn Maajah records that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said in another hadith stressing the aspect of brotherhood and its relation to business dealings, "A Muslim is a brother to a Muslim. It is not permissible for a Muslim to sell something defective to his brother without making that [defect] clear to him."[339]

Other Forbidden Sources of Wealth

There are other obvious forbidden forms of obtaining wealth. These include robbery, through bribery, gambling and extremely speculative transac-

[338] Recorded by Muslim.

[339] Recorded by ibn Maajah. Ahmad and al-Haakim have something similar. According to al-Albaani, it is *sahih*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 2, p. 1136.

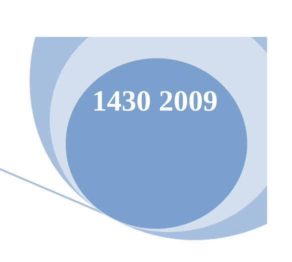


tions. A Muslim is also not allowed to sell or trade articles that are forbidden in Islam, even if he himself does not consume them. Hence, a Muslim is not allowed to sell alcohol, porn, drugs and the like.

Conclusions

In this chapter, the interactions of a believer were discussed. The true belief in God should permeate every aspect of an individual's life, especially his interaction with others of God's creation. Thus, starting with how he treats himself, the individual realizes that he is one of God's creatures and therefore must treat himself in a way that is pleasing to God. In order to achieve this goal, Allah has mercifully sent humans clear guidance to teach them how to behave even with respect to their own selves.

The individual created by God obviously, then, cannot claim for himself the right to treat others in any way he wishes. Again, Allah has provided guidance in this area as well. Whether it is with respect to one's parents, children, neighbors, others in society—even animals and inanimate objects such as wealth—there is a way of behavior that is representative of one's belief in Allah. It behooves a believer to learn this proper behavior and to exert himself to live by it in his life to the best of his ability.



Fortifying and Increasing One's Faith

This chapter is a discussion of the means of fortifying and increasing one's faith. As has been alluded to earlier, a Muslim should never be complacent with respect to his faith. Faith increases and decreases. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "By the One whom there is no other God, one of you does the actions of Paradise until there is just a hand's span between him and Paradise and then the Book [preordainment] overtakes him and he does the actions of the people of Hell and he enters into it."[340]

A Muslim must be very clear about his goal in life. When he is clear about his goal in life, he must be able to identify the means and measures that will assist him to meet that goal. Similarly, he must be aware of the impediments and harmful aspects that harm him with respect to his goal. Finally, when he does slip, he needs to know the best way that will put him, Allah willing, right back on the proper track.

The Concept of Purification of the Soul

In another work, this author has defined the concept of purification of the soul as,

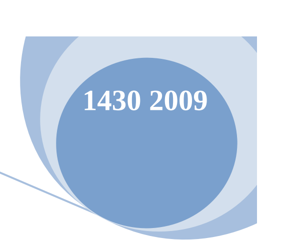
> The process in which the healthy elements found in the soul are fostered, built upon and added to while any invading contaminants are removed or controlled such that the person worships Allah properly and fulfills his purpose in life, which can culminate in the ultimate expression of true *ihsaan*.[341]

Purification of the soul is a "process." In other words, it is not something static. It is, in fact, dynamic and it can be volatile. A person may be moving closer and closer to his absolute potential with respect to purification of his soul or he may move further away from it.

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[340] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

[341] *Ihsaan* refers to the ultimate level of worshipping Allah wherein one worships Allah as if he is seeing Allah in front of him. the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) explained this concept when he said, "It is that you worship Allah as if you see Him. And even though you do not see Him, He sees you." (Recorded by Muslim.)



Again, the goal is to become as complete and truthful a servant of Allah as one can be. Allah explains that purpose in life in the verse, "I have only created jinn and men that they may worship Me" (51:56). The goal of life is to worship and please Allah—thus, to receive His pleasure in return.

The most exalted, noble, and honored a human can be is by worshipping Allah. In reality, there is nothing greater or nobler than that. This is something that should be clear on every Muslim's mind. The more he moves to that goal, the happier he should become and the more honor he should feel by submitting himself to the only true God and Lord.

Al-Miqreezee notes that this proper form of worship entails four aspects:

(1) Determining what Allah and His Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) love and are pleased with;

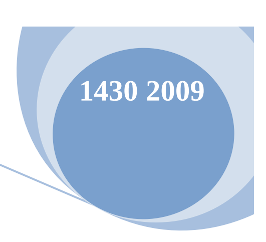
(2) The embodying of and enacting upon those beloved aspects in one's own heart;

(3) Enacting upon those aspects in one's speech;

(4) Further enacting upon those aspects in one's actions.[342]

Each one of these aspects is necessary if a person desires to fulfill his goal of being a true worshipper and servant of Allah. The individual first recognizes that the manner that he is to worship Allah is not based on his own individual inclinations, logic or whims. Instead, it must be based on what comes from Allah Himself. Allah is the only one who can state how He is to be worshipped. Hence, the first step is to determine what Allah wants from the individual and what is pleasing to Him. This is achieved by getting knowledge of the Quran and Sunnah. This knowledge must then be transformed into an acceptance and desire for those things in one's heart. One must recognize those things as the true good things and one, hence, must have a feeling of love for those things in one's heart. When this is accomplished, the proclamation of

[342] Quoted by the translator of ibn Taimiyyah, *Servitude*, from Al-Miqreezee, *Tajreed al-Tauheed al-Mufeed*, p. 29, fn. 54.



one's acceptance and belief as well as the application of this acceptance via one's deeds should automatically accompany it.

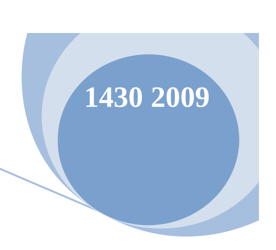
Ibn Taimiyyah has expounded further on the true meaning of *ibaadah* ("worship, service"). He wrote,

> As for *'Ibaadah*, its original meaning also denotes lowliness and submission. One says, "a pathway that is *mu'abbad*" i.e., it has become smoothed out because of being treaded upon.
>
> However, the *'Ibaadah* that has been enjoined (upon us) encompasses the meaning of submission along with the meaning of love. It embodies the utmost degree of submission to Allah through the utmost degree of love of Him…
>
> One who submits to a person whilst possessing hatred for him is not an *'aabid* (i.e., worshipper) of him and (in contrast) if he was to love someone and at the same time does not submit to him, he is likewise not an *'aabid* of him, as is the case of a man who loves his child and friend. Consequently, only one of the two (qualities) is not sufficient as far as the *'ibaadah* of Allah is concerned. Rather, it is necessary that Allah be the most beloved above all else to the *'abd* and that he holds Allah to be the greatest of all. Indeed, none other than Allah deserves total love and submission.[343]

Another very important point to keep in mind is that purification of the soul is not simply related to the ritual acts of worship or acts that one may consider "religious" or "spiritual."[344] As noted earlier, the goal of purification is to

[343] [Ahmad ibn Taimiyyah,] *Ibn Taimiyyah's Essay on Servitude*, pp. 37-38.

[344] Historically speaking, some pious folk made the error of going to an opposite extreme when they noted the masses indulging in the comforts of this world. They decided to denounce everything of this world as being against the concept of purification of the soul, even working within society to make it a more religious environment. However, their opposite extreme is also an incorrect approach. The correct approach is that of the proper balance in one's life. This is where one neither over-indulges in nor is overly-attached to the comforts of this world nor does he neglect his lawful needs and responsibilities in this world. As always, the guiding principles to find this balance are found in the Quran, the Sunnah and the way of the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). As a starting point, one may study and reflect upon the following verse of the Quran: "But seek, with the (wealth) which Allah has bestowed on you the



become as complete a servant of Allah as one can. The correct concept of servitude or *ibaadah* is very comprehensive. *Ibaadah* is, as ibn Taimiyyah stated in his well-known and widely accepted definition of the term,

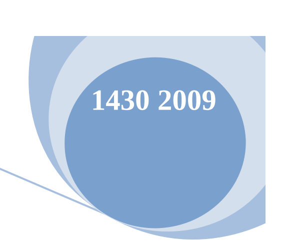
> A noun comprising every word or deed, internal or manifest, that Allah loves and approves. This includes prayer, Zakat, fasting, pilgrimage, speaking the truth, fulfilling trusts, doing good to parents and relatives, keeping promises, enjoining good, forbidding evil, Jihad against the disbelievers and hypocrites, good behavior towards neighbors, orphans, the poor, travelers, slaves and animals, prayer and supplication, remembering God and reading the Quran and so on; similarly it includes to love Allah and His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), to fear Him and turn to Him in repentance, to be patient in adversity and thankful in prosperity, to resign oneself to Allah's decrees, to put one's trust in His help, to hope for His mercy, and to fear His punishment. All of these form part of *ibaadah* (worship and servitude) to God.[345]

Hence, the purification of the soul permeates every part of a person. It touches upon his internal characteristics as well as his outward actions. As Islahi noted, "*Tazkiah* [purification] deals with all the apparent and hidden aspects of ourselves… Our thoughts, our apprehensions, our inclinations, our movements, our eating and drinking, our engagements, hobbies, and interests, the daily routines in our lives, in short, no department and nothing that touches our lives is outside the pale of *tazkiah*."[346]

Home of the Hereafter, but do not forget your portion in this world. But do good, as Allah has been good to you, and seek not (occasions for) mischief in the land: for Allah loves not those who do mischief." (28:77).

[345] Ibn Taimiyyah, *Majmoo*, vol. 10, p. 449. The word *ibaadah* is used by scholars in two different ways, thus occasionally being a source of confusion. In one usage, it is the general meaning as given above by ibn Taimiyyah. However, it is also sometimes used to refer to the particular ritual acts of worship only. Hence, one finds in the works of *fiqh*, for example, a chapter on *ibaadaat* (meaning the ritual acts, such as ritual cleanliness, prayer, zakat) and then a chapter on *mu'aamalaat* (acts of social interaction, such as business dealings and so forth). Again, in the general sense of the word, though, all of these deeds fall under the realm of *ibaadah* or the correct worship and servitude to Allah.

[346] Amin Ahsan Islahi, *Self-Purification and Development* (Delhi: Adam Publishers and Distributors, 2000), p. 21.



Murad has noted a very important point that is actually one of the benefits of this proper understanding of purification of the soul, reflecting once again the importance of having one single comprehensive goal in one's life. He noted,

Unless you approach *tazkiah* [purification] as an all-embracing process, you will find that your life is compartmentalised, certain parts impeding the development of others. This can only result in a life of disharmony and unhappiness. Approached as a comprehensive and all-embracing process, however, you will find that each part of your life will complement some other part. This should, God willing, make your struggle on the path to God and *Janna* [Paradise] easier and full of grace.[347]

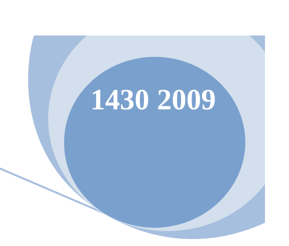
The Increase or Decrease of Faith

It is very clear from the Quran that a person's faith increases and decreases. For example, Allah says, "And when His verses are recited to them, they [the verses] increase their faith" (8:2); "That the Believers may increase in faith" (74:31); "It is He who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the Believers, in order that faith be added to their faith" (48: 4); "Those to whom people said: 'A great army is gathering against you, hence you should fear it, but such only increased their faith and they said: 'For us Allah is sufficient'; He is the Perfect Disposer of affairs" (3:173).

There is no question that there are differences in the outward deeds of humankind. This is a reflection and an aspect of the increase and decrease in faith. One must not believe, though, that such is the only fluctuation of faith. Actually, all of the aspects of faith are exposed to this possibility, including— or especially— the deeds of the heart. Even the level of "belief" in the heart or certainty can change in one person and certainly is different from one person to the next. Indeed, one's love for Allah, fear of Allah, trust in Allah and other aspects of the heart are probably the most prone to change and fluctuation.

Perhaps every individual has experienced this fact described in the verses above. At times, a person is very aware of Allah and of his fear and love

[347] Khurram Murad, *In the Early Hours: Reflections on Spiritual and Self Development* (Markfield, United Kingdom: Revival Publications, 2000), p. 16.

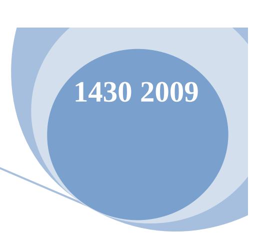


for Him. This strong feeling in the person's heart brings tranquility and warmth to the person and it also keeps him from committing sins. Not only that, it drives him to sacrifice and work harder for the sake of Allah. He becomes very anxious to get up late at night for prayer, for example, or give freely for the sake of Allah. However, at other times, perhaps when the affairs of this world are engulfing him, his remembrance and attachment to Allah is not that great. He does not feel that great feeling of faith in his heart. His behavior and actions are not of the same quality as they are at other times. When he encounters this stage, when he thinks about getting up at night for prayer or giving charity for the sake of Allah, his soul becomes too tired or not willing to sacrifice. This is nothing but the fluctuations of faith in the person's heart.

There may be times when a person is at a very high level of faith and remembrance of Allah. When he mixes with worldly events, his family and friends, he may not be at that same level. This type of occurrence even happened to Abu Bakr. A hadith in *Sahih Muslim* states that Abu Bakr asked Handhalah, another Companion, how he was doing. He answered that he was committing hypocrisy. He explained that by saying that when they are with the Prophet (peace be upon him) and reminded of Heaven and Hell, they are as if they are seeing Heaven and Hell. Then when they retreat to their families, they forget much of what they felt earlier. Abu Bakr stated that he also experienced the same. This is something natural. The person should learn to appreciate those times when he was at his highest level of faith and seek to maintain them for as long as possible.

Even the level of affirmation and knowledge in the heart varies from person to person and time to time in one person. Ibn Taimiyyah states that the affirmation in the heart of the person who simply knows the general aspects of the teaching of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) will not be the same as that of the person who knows the details of the Prophet's life and teachings. Similarly, the one who knows more about Allah's names and attributes, the life of the Hereafter and so forth will be at a different level of affirmation and knowledge than the one who is ignorant of such matters.[348] Ibn Taimiya also argues that the faith of a person who knows the proofs for his

[348] Ibn Taimiya, *Majmoo*, vol. 7, p. 564.



beliefs and recognizes the falsehood of other beliefs will be stronger and greater than the one who is unaware of these aspects.[349]

Ibn Taimiya concludes that there is nothing more variable in the heart of man than faith. He says that people should be able to recognize this fact when they consider one of the components of faith, which is love. People recognize their own different levels of love. Love sometimes simply implies a desire to be with or close to one's beloved. However, it can reach the level where one cannot live without being in the presence of one's beloved.[350] Similarly, faith, of which love for Allah is one component, can be extremely variable.

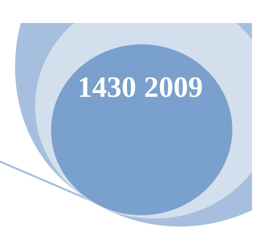
This question of faith increasing or decreasing is not simply a theoretical question over which the scholars of the past differed. If a person feels that he has faith and that it is a fixed attribute, he will not strive to increase his faith and he will not fear or notice a decrease in it. This approach in itself can be very dangerous to his faith as the person may not recognize the signs that his faith is decreasing.

Thus, every believer must keep in mind the fact that faith increases and decreases. Hence, the believer should always be on the lookout for any sign that his faith is decreasing. Indeed, he should take positive steps to increase his faith. One can find an example in the Companions of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). One Companion took another by the hand and said, "Come let us [increase our] faith for a period of time."[351] This was in reference to reading the Quran, remembering Allah and so forth, actions which will help one revive and increase one's faith.

The Development and Growth of One's Faith

When one first makes the declaration of faith, he has started on the road to being a true Muslim and a true believer. The first step is to cleanse oneself of the clear, major, encompassing form of associating partners with God. This is the first and absolutely necessary step, such that no other act or step will be

[349] Ibn Taimiya, *Majmoo*, vol. 7, pp. 565-566.
[350] Ibn Taimiya, *Majmoo*, vol. 7, pp. 566-567.
[351] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



of benefit or use without it. However, this does not mean that it is a once and for all step or a constant with no room for growth and improvement.

Murad perceptively noted,

You now have a mission: to become a *mumin* [true believer] and *mujahid* [one who strives for the sake of Allah]. As you embark upon this mission you may come to feel that your knowledge of Islam is somewhat limited or perhaps that you are unable to attain those heights of submission and purification that you desire or others expect of you. This is only natural. You must not, however, allow these feelings of personal shortcomings to undermine your efforts to practise Islam. Remember that Islam is a state of becoming not a state of being. Each day you must strive to improve and better yourself—and you will improve [Allah willing]...

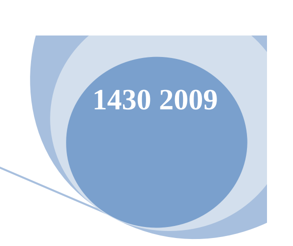
Once you have committed yourself to Allah, all that you have must be spent in His way. This is the ideal. Ideals, however, are always difficult to achieve—and this you must understand and accept. Ideals are always to be pursued; if they are easily and always achievable, they can hardly remain as ideals. Keeping to your side of the bargain [mentioned in *al-Taubah:* 111[352]] then is an ideal that you must always seek to maintain. It is this seeking and this striving to spend all that we have in the way of Allah that is known as *Jihad* and alternatively, in this instance, as *tazkiah* [purification].[353]

When a person first embraces Islam—or when a born Muslim first makes a commitment to Islam—his heart may be free of the greater associating of partners with Allah and disbelief, but that does not mean that he understands

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[352] The verse reads: "Allah has purchased from the believers their souls and their wealth. For theirs (in return) is the Garden (of Paradise). They fight for His Cause, and slay and are slain. [This reward is] a promise binding on Him in truth, through the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran. And who is more faithful to his covenant than Allah? Then rejoice in the bargain which you have concluded. That is the supreme achievement." (9:111)

[353] Murad, pp. 6-7. Elsewhere (p. 13), he wrote, "Likewise, hope is central to your efforts and your success. You must sincerely hope and believe that everything you do to earn the pleasure of Allah will lead you to fulfillment. A superiority complex negates the task of self development. An inferiority complex is derived from a lack of confidence in Allah and oneself. You should never allow yourself to believe that you cannot fulfil your obligations nor should you despair of the mercy of Allah. Confidence, hope and determination are all important ingredients for your success."



all of the concepts of pure monotheism or that in his heart there is not some minor remnants of shirk and disbelief. Allah says about the Bedouins, "The Bedouins say, 'We have believed.' Say [to them], 'You have not yet [truly believed] but instead you should say, "We have submitted" for faith has yet to [completely] penetrate your hearts. But if you obey Allah and His Messenger, He will not deprive you [of the rewards for] your deeds. Verily, Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (49: 14).

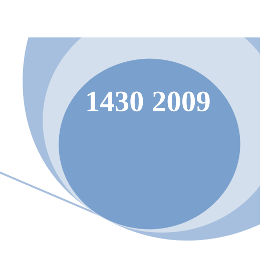
Indeed, some shortcomings with respect to the complete concept of pure monotheism even occurred among new Muslims at the time of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), although they were fluent in Arabic, thus having an understanding of the basic meanings of the Quran, and they also lived during the time of the revelation itself. Note the following report:

Abu Waaqid al-Laithi narrated that when the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was going out to the Hunain [before its battle] they passed by a tree of the polytheists known as *dhaat anwaat* on which they would hang their weapons. They [some Companions] said, "O Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), make for us a *dhaat anwaat* like they have a *dhaat anwaat*." The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Exalted be Allah. This is like when the people of Moses said, 'Make for us an idol like they have an idol.' By the One in whose Hand is my soul, you shall certainly follow the practices of the people who came before you."[354]

However, as one grows in faith, new horizons become clear to him—they may actually be related to things that he already admitted to knowing but he had never really experienced or tasted them in the past. These new understandings related to his faith purify him even further and allow him to grow spiritually in matters that have been difficult for people to describe.

The quote below from ibn al-Qayyim highlights some aspects of faith that may not necessarily be in the person's heart when he first becomes Muslim or when he is practicing Islam. However, as he grows in the faith, these

[354] Recorded by Ahmad and al-Tirmidhi. According to al-Albaani, it is *sahih*. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh Sunan al-Tirmidhi* (Riyadh: Maktab al-Tarbiyah al-Arabi li-Duwal al-Khaleej, 1988), vol. 2, p. 235.

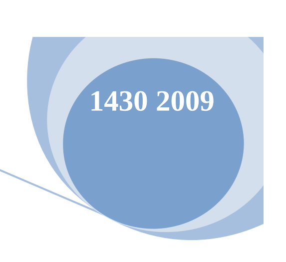


aspects become stronger and stronger and they begin to develop in him more and more of their desired effects. For example, a new Muslim may see the rain come down from the sky and then recall the forecast on the news the previous night, simply thinking that all of the factors were there for the rain to come and hence it rained. On the other hand, the believer whose knowledge and realization of Allah is at a different level, realizes that Allah has brought about that rain not haphazardly. Perhaps, it was an act of mercy from Allah or the first moments of some punishment from Allah.

Ibn al-Qayyim wrote,

When the servant knows that Allah alone is in charge of harming and benefiting, giving and withholding, creating and providing, giving life and bringing about death, it produces the acts of worship of completely putting one's trust and reliance in Him in one's heart, and what such reliance necessitates of trust and outward deeds. The servant's knowledge about Allah's hearing, seeing and knowledge—not even the smallest of physical particles in the heavens and earth is unseen to Him—and that He knows the secret and hidden and the deception of the eyes as well as what is hidden in the breasts produces in the person a keen guarding over his tongue, physical limbs and thoughts in the heart to keep them away from everything that is displeasing to Allah. Furthermore, it makes him involve those bodily parts in acts that are beloved and pleasing to Allah. This in turn produces an inward shyness. It also produces a shyness that makes the person avoid the forbidden and evil acts. [The servant's] knowledge of Allah's self-sufficiency, generosity, graciousness, kindness and mercy makes the person become very hopeful in Allah. Furthermore, it produces in him similar acts of external and inward forms of worship in accord with his level of understanding and knowledge. Similarly, his recognition of Allah's grandeur, greatness and magnificence produces in him humility, submission and love. It also produces in him internal emotions and feelings of worship as well as the external acts that these require. Similar, his knowledge of Allah's perfection, beauty and exalted attributes manifests itself in a special kind of love found in the different levels of worship.[355]

[355] Ibn al-Qayyim, *Miftaah Daar al-Saadah*, vol. 2, p. 90.



The Path to Increasing One's Faith and Purifying One's Soul

The path espoused by the Quran and Sunnah for purifying one's soul is amazingly very clear and actually easy to follow for all those whose intentions are pure. Indeed, it is a path that is open for every human to follow. It basically is comprised of three components: (1) purification of one's beliefs; (2) drawing closer to Allah by performing the obligatory deeds and (3) drawing even closer to Allah by the voluntary deeds.

The Proper Belief in Allah

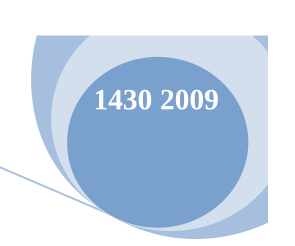
The proper belief in Allah is without a doubt the first aspect on the road to self-purification and the key to real success and happiness in this life and in the Hereafter. Allah says, "He has certainly succeeded who has purified himself" (87:14). The Quranic commentators note that this is referring first to purifying oneself from *shirk* (associating partners with Allah) and *kufr* (disbelief).[356] It has been narrated that ibn Abbaas explained this verse by saying, "Whoever purifies himself from *shirk*."[357]

Indeed, it has been deviations from the correct belief in God that has misled most of humankind. In other words, for much of humankind today, it is not the case that they do not believe in God but it is the case that their belief, based on their own whims and desires or their choice to blindly follow others, is distorted and not based on any true source of knowledge concerning God. For example, many people today believe that as long as a person is a "nice" person and does not do harm to others, God would never be displeased with such a person and they will enter Paradise or achieve some kind of bliss.[358]

Thus, having the proper belief about God does not even enter into the equation, as long as the person is a "nice" person. Actually, a person could be

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[356] For the explanation of this verse and why it must be in reference to disbelief and idolatry, see al-Fakhar al-Raazi, *Al-Tafseer al-Kabeer* (Beirut: Daar Ihyaa al-Turaath al-Arabi, n.d.), vol. 31, pp. 146-147. Cf., also, Jalaal al-Deen al-Suyooti, *al-Durr fi al-Tafseer al-Mathoor* (Beirut: Daar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyyah, 1990), vol. 6, p. 567-568.
[357] Quoted in al-Tabari, vol. 15, p. 156.
[358] This author has heard this statement from numerous people who are adherents of Christianity, Judaism and, amazingly, Islam.



a devil worshipper or a believer in one hundred idols yet all of that does not seem to matter. Although one may commonly hear such ideas expressed, all such thoughts are simply the people's own suppositions about God. They are false and have no proof to support them.

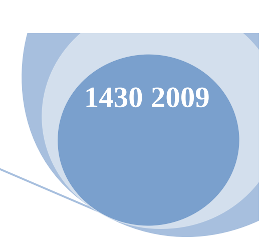
In reality, the acceptance of this fact—that there is none worthy of worship except Allah, the first statement of the testimony of faith—is the first step in becoming a Muslim and on the road to purification of the soul, purifying one's beliefs and one's heart from any form of *shirk* or associating partners with Allah.

Associating partners with Allah is a great form of wrongdoing. In particular, one is completely wronging one's own soul and dignity by submitting to and worshipping beings that do not deserve a human's worship whatsoever. Allah has stated in the Quran, while quoting Luqmaan, "Indeed associating [partners with Allah] is a great wrongdoing" (31:13).

On the other end of the spectrum there is the committing of *shirk*, which includes all of the other beliefs prevalent in the world today. This includes the other "monotheistic" faiths of Judaism and Christianity. Those who commit *shirk* go to an extreme for which, in truth, there is no excuse. Their own souls and beings know that their *shirk* is completely repugnant and that they are following it only to satisfy some lowly desires. Hence, Allah will forgive any sin except *shirk*. Allah says, "Allah does not forgive that partners should be set up with Him; but He forgives whatever is less than that for whom He pleases; to set up partners with Allah is to devise a sin most heinous indeed" (4:48; see also 4:116).

Those who commit *shirk* are deserving of an eternal damnation as it was their intention to forever remain along the path of their false beliefs. Hence, Allah has forbidden His pleasure and paradise for them, saying, "Whoever joins others with Allah, Allah will forbid him the Garden, and the Fire will be his abode. There will for the wrongdoers be no one to help" (5:72).

Once again, therefore, without this first step of purification—the purification of one's beliefs at least to the extent of removing all forms of *shirk*—nothing else will be of any avail. The heart must be purified first with *tauheed*



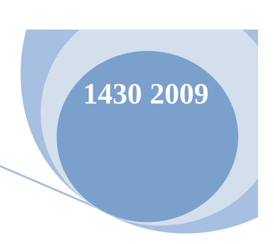
before one can truly move on to anything else. If that is not done first, then all of the following steps will be in vain. Any deed that is not done purely and solely for the sake of Allah will be in vain and rejected by Allah. A hadith states that Allah has said, "I am the most self-sufficient and am in no need of having a partner. Whoever does a deed for My sake as well as for someone [or something] else will have that action rejected by Me with the one he associates [with Allah]."[359]

The Proper Attitude Toward the Messenger (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him)

Directly related to the belief in *tauheed* and directly related to the question of purification of the soul is one's attitude toward the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). One does not become a Muslim and one does not begin on the path of purification until he makes the testimony of faith. This testimony is composed of two very different but essential components: "I bear witness that there is none worthy of worship except Allah and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." By making this testimony, the person is affirming his intent to worship none other than Allah as well as to worship Allah in the manner set forth by the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). With respect to both matters, the individual dedicates himself to Allah via the teachings that have come through the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

Hence, everyone has to understand who the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was and what is his role in purifying one's soul. His role is simple: His is the human example that every Muslim must aspire to as his way was based on guidance from Allah. His life and behavior is the one showing all Muslims the proper way to purify their souls. This is true whether one is speaking about how to pray, fast, fight, order good, become patient, earn Allah's love, become a devout worshipper, deal with friends, associates, family, orphans and so forth.

[359] Recorded by Muslim.



Commenting on the phenomenon of failing to recognize or turn to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) as the teacher of purification of the soul, ibn al-Qayyim wrote,

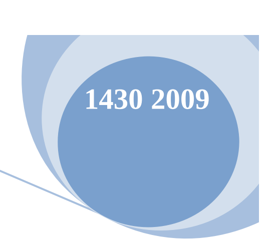
The concept of purification of the souls must be submitted to the way of the messengers. Allah has sent them alone for the purpose of this purification and has put them in charge of it. He has placed in their hands the call, teachings and clarification. They have been sent to cure the souls of the nations. Allah says, "It is He Who has sent among the Unlettered a messenger from among themselves, to rehearse to them His Signs, to purify them, and to instruct them in the Book and Wisdom, although they had been before in manifest error" (*al-Jumu'ah* 2). Purification of the soul is more difficult and harder than curing one's physical body. Whoever [tries to] purify his soul via spiritual exercises, striving and seclusion which the messengers never taught is like a sick person who tries to cure himself based on his own personal opinion. What is the place of his opinion with respect to the knowledge of the physician? The messengers are the physicians of the hearts. There is no way to purify the hearts or make them sound except via their paths and at their hands, with a complete submission and obedience to them.[360]

Furthermore, Allah makes it clear that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) was sent to these people to be an example *par excellence* for anyone who wants to come closer to Allah and be successful in the Hereafter. Allah says, "You have indeed in the Messenger of Allah a beautiful pattern (of conduct) for any one whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the remembrance of Allah" (*al-Ahzaab* 21). Hence, the true believer would do his best to emulate the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) in all matters of his life as sanctioned by the Sharee'ah.[361] This desire to emulate is called "pursuance" by Islahi and he explains it thusly,

The scope of pursuance is much wider than that of obedience. Under obedience fall only those things which are in the nature of Commandments, highly stressed duties and the do's and don'ts, but in the ambit of pursuance

[360] Ibn al-Qayyim, *Madaarij*, vol. 2, p. 315.

[361] There are some matters that are specific to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) only and there are some acts of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) that were due to custom, for example, and not necessarily meant as exemplary for all peoples.



fall even the commendatory and non-obligatory acts… Man may obey something without the least tinge of sincerity and love in it. But in pursuance the sentiments of reverence and regard for the pursued in one's life is an essential condition…

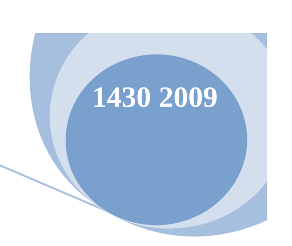
The reason behind the zest of the Companions in the pursuance of the Prophet was the love of God, and to become a beloved of His could not be attained only through obedience to the Prophet, but in fact through following him sincerely in all walks of life. The Prophet is the embodiment of the cognition of God and every air and style of his is the sign of such cognition. That is why those who love God love every iota in the life of the Prophet. In the life of the Prophet they observe the knowledge that is acquired through the cognition of God; they notice actions that result from such cognition and they watch habits that God is pleased with… And since they do it all for the love of God, they are rewarded by Him and become His beloved. It is this fact brought out in the following verse of the Quran: "Say (O Mohammad), 'If you love God, follow me: God will love you'" [*ali-Imraan* 31].[362]

There is another important fact that definitively needs to be emphasized concerning the belief in the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). He is not just an example, but he is *the* example. There is no manner of living and no belief system that is superior to that of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). Furthermore, there is no individual who was closer and more beloved to Allah than the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).[363]

A person will not be able to completely internalize this and act upon this concept until he has a strong love and appreciation for the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him). In fact, this love for the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is a requirement of the faith itself. In other

[362] Islahi, pp. 92-93.

[363] The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "Allah took me as His most intimate friend (*khaleel*) as He had earlier taken Abraham as His most intimate friend." (Recorded by Muslim.) The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) also said, "If I were to take an inhabitant of the Earth as my most intimate friend, I would choose Abu Bakr. But Allah, the Most Gracious, has taken your companion [that is, the Prophet] as His most intimate friend." (Recorded by Muslim.)



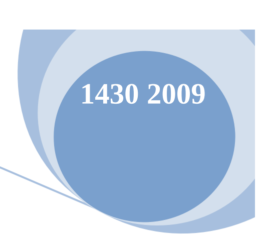
words, one's faith cannot be proper without it and one cannot purify himself without it. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself said, "None of you are true believers until I am more beloved to him than his father, his children and all of mankind."[364]

On this point, also, Islahi has made an excellent comment, noting that the love for the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is a love based on intellect and principles which a person comes to foster with a principle or an ideology, and because of which he keeps that principle and that particular ideology predominant everywhere in his life, and sacrifices every other principle, way of life or desire to that cherished principle or way of life, but not vice versa. For the promotion and upliftment of this principle and ideology he can see everything else degraded but cannot tolerate the degradation of his cherished ideology. If his own self is in the way of his ideology he gives it a fight, and if others stand in the way to block it he fights them, so much so that even if the demands of his own wife and children and relatives collide with the demands of this ideology, he stands on the side of his ideology to support it and without any pangs of love and regards, spurns the wishes of his wife and children and the demands of his tribe and nation.[365]

When a love of this nature is truly internalized, it becomes natural for the person to emulate and imitate his object of admiration. One see this phenomenon in all walks of life. This explains why fans, for example, want to know so many details about the actors, athletes or stars that they idolize. Part of the goal is to know about them and part of the goal is to try to emulate them as much as possible. This feeling of devotion and willingness to emulate must be even greater for the person who realizes that via emulation and following of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) he can conquer the true way to spiritual purification.

In sum, in order to truly purify one's soul, one must make sure that one's attitude toward the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) is correct. One must have belief in the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and that belief must be correct. One must also

[364] Recorded by al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[365] Islahi, pp. 95-96.



obey the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), seek to emulate him and love him and his way.[366] When all of these matters are fulfilled, one is on the firmest path leading to the purification of the soul, which in itself was one of the main purposes for the sending of the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

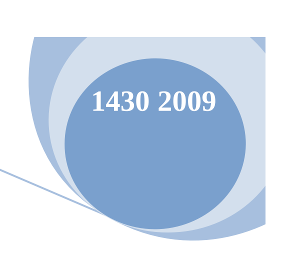
Murad offers one more interesting point concerning the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) and his role in the purification of one's soul. After discussing the materialism of Western societies, how such societies are even creeping upon the Muslim world and how the West's ultimate emphasis upon what can be materially measured and denial of the unseen is the antithesis of Islam, he noted,

Once you have chosen to live in a "Western type" society, the only source of light for you is the Messenger of Allah. He was also faced with an almost similar situation. As he came down from the cave of Hira', after his experience of receiving the light of Divine guidance, he re-entered a culture and society which were quite "alien" to his Message. His Message began by linking the whole of life to the name of Allah. That was the starting point. All knowledge, all culture, all civilisation and all human action must be centred on one pivot and that is the name of Allah. This was a totally strange Message for the society in which he had to operate. So, we need to look at the Prophet's Sunnah in the context of operating in an "alien" society and see how we can practise a genuine Islamic culture…

Secondly, while living in an "alien" culture, you have to preserve your Islamic identity—not only through rational arguments, but through emotional, cultural and civilisational symbols. It is only the Sunnah that can provide these emotional and civilisational symbols through which you will not only preserve your identity but strengthen and advance it.[367]

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[366] Islahi (p. 96) noted, "Obedience without love is hypocrisy and love without obedience and pursuance [that is, emulation] is innovation."
[367] Murad, pp. 91-93.



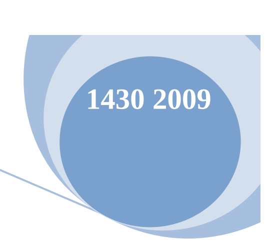
Performing Righteous Deeds

In numerous places in the Quran, Allah makes it clear that the key to salvation is not a mere declaration of one's faith or a false faith that has no righteous deeds as its fruits. Instead, the key is a true faith that combines with and is the driving force behind performing righteous deeds. In fact, the scholars note that faith is actually comprised of the belief in the heart, the statement of the tongue and the deeds of the physical body. Hence, a person's faith cannot be complete without performing the proper deeds.

Allah clearly relates the performance of good deeds with having faith. For example, He says, "Whoever works any act of righteousness and has faith, his endeavor will not be rejected: We shall record it in his favor" (21:94). Indeed, the only way to be saved from perdition is through faith and good deeds, as Allah says, "By (the token of) Time (through the ages), verily man is in loss, except those who have faith, do righteous deeds, (join together) in the mutual teaching of truth, and of patience and constancy" (103:1-3). In another verse, Allah clearly shows that it is faith and deeds that lead one to Paradise or the Hell-fire. Allah says, "Nay, whoever earns evil and his sin has surrounded him, they are Companions of the Fire: therein shall they abide (forever). But those who have faith and work righteousness, they are companions of the garden: therein shall they abide (forever)" (2:81-82).[368]

Hence, the second obligatory step in purifying the soul and becoming beloved to Allah is the performance of the deeds that Allah has made obligatory upon the believers. (This goes hand in hand with the increase in *imaan* and *tauheed* and there is a very important dynamic relationship between the two that is difficult sometimes to fathom but which is very clear to the person who experiences it.) Again, this point is made very clearly in the hadith just quoted

[368] This does not mean to imply that it is by deeds alone that one is entered into Paradise. Indeed, the greatest deeds that one can perform are not such that they would deserve Paradise in return. However, via the performance of good deeds, Allah showers the person with His grace and mercy. It is this grace and mercy that allows the person to be entered into Paradise. If a person does not have faith followed up with righteous deeds, he is not deserving of Allah's mercy and, hence, he will not receive this great reward from Allah. This is the meaning of the Prophet's words, "One's deeds will not enter anyone into Paradise." They said, "Not even you, O Messenger of Allah?" he replied, "No, not even me unless Allah covers me with His grace and mercy." (Recorded by al-Bukhari with this wording.)



above. In that hadith, Allah has said, "My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more loved by Me than the religious duties I have imposed upon him."

Note that the stress here has been on the obligatory deeds. This is due to their extreme importance. Indeed, everyone should dedicate himself to performing those deeds first. In other words, one has to tend to the obligatory deeds before preoccupying oneself with voluntary deeds. As al-Toofi stated,

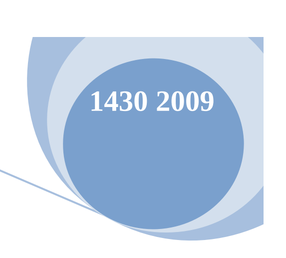
> The order to perform the obligatory duties is a strict one. The one who does not perform them falls into punishment. On both of these matters, the case of the voluntary deeds is different. They are similar to the obligatory deeds in that in both of them one earns a reward. However, the obligatory deeds are more complete. For that reason, they are more beloved to Allah and take one closer to Him. The obligatory deeds are like the foundation while the voluntary deeds are like the branches and the building. If a person fulfills the obligatory deeds in the way that they are commanded to be fulfilled, with proper respect and esteem by submitting to Him and demonstrating the greatness of His Lordship and submission of His worship, one gets closer to Him in the greatest way.[369]

The obligatory deeds are like the foundation or roots while the voluntary deeds are like the branches. If a person first fulfills those foundations, he is demonstrating his foundation of being willing to submit to Allah. Hence, that is the best way that he earns his Lord's approval.[370]However, if one does not first fulfill those deeds that Allah has made obligatory, one does not demonstrate his willingness to submit and obey whatever Allah has ordered. In other words, he fails to fulfill one of the greatest steps in the process of purification. Therefore, the first step must be the fulfillment of the obligatory duties.

The Obligatory Deeds May Be Divided Into The Following Four Categories:

(1) The obligatory deeds (feelings and emotions) of the heart:

[369] Quoted in Ahmad Fareed, *Al-Tazkiah baina Ahl al-Sunnah wa al-Soofiyah* (no publication information given), p. 22.
[370] Cf., Ahmad ibn Hajar, *Fath al-Baari bi-Sharh Saheeh al-Bukhaari* (Makkah: al-Maktaba al-Tijaariyyah, 1993), vol. 13, p. 145.



(2) The ritual pillars of Islam:

(3) The other obligatory acts:

(4) Abstaining from the forbidden acts:

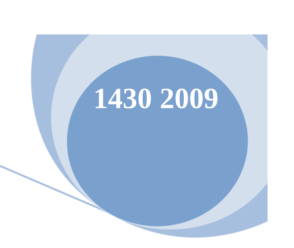
If a person fulfills only the obligatory acts in their proper fashion, he should be able to reach a certain level of spiritual purification. However, most likely, the process of purification will not stop at the obligatory deeds alone. The feeling and love for more purifying acts will flow and the believer will seek other righteous deeds that will bring him even closer to Allah. Hence, the third step in the purification of one's soul is the performance of the voluntary deeds after one has attended to the deeds that are obligatory upon him.

The voluntary deeds include all of the deeds that are not strictly obligated and which have some sign that they are praiseworthy acts. These deeds are also at different levels of virtue. Some virtuous deeds were greatly emphasized by the Prophet (peace be upon him) while others were not so emphasized. In other words, some voluntary deeds are much more virtuous than others. The more virtuous a voluntary deed, the closer it takes a person to Allah.

In referring to the very important hadith *qudsi* referred to herein more than once, in which the Allah has stated, "My servant does not draw near to Me with anything more beloved to Me than the religious duties that I have imposed upon him; and My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works such that I love him."[371]

Finally, it is very important to note—and it is a great blessing from Allah—that this path is not a path that necessarily takes a long amount of time or requires that the person pass through certain stages. A person can become one of the purified and devoted servants of Allah very quickly by sincerity and devotion to Allah. This true sincerity and devotion may come after he performs only a few deeds. Indeed, from the outset, he may perform those deeds that are obligatory upon him and he becomes beloved to Allah. Then he continues

[371] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



on that path, with Allah guiding him to what is good and proper. This will be a sign that he is continuing as one of Allah's *auliyaa* (devoted servants). Again, this "easy path" is part of the great mercy and blessings of Allah. [372]

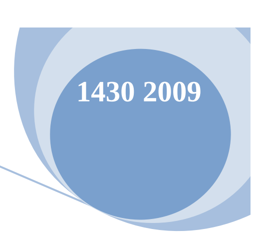
A conclusion from the hadith above is that some believers move even closer to Allah by not only fulfilling the obligatory duties but by additionally performing the voluntary deeds (and these are numerous). When a person performs the obligatory deeds, he demonstrates his willingness to submit to Allah. In addition, he is doing what he needs to do to protect himself from Allah's punishment. However, if on top of those deeds he also performs voluntary deeds, this demonstrates his sincerity to Allah and his true willingness to please Allah. This is no longer a matter of fulfilling a command from Allah or rescuing oneself from punishment. Now one is doing the acts to get even closer and become more beloved to Allah.

Therefore, it is no wonder that such people who perform the voluntary deeds (which includes staying away from the disliked deeds) receive a special love from Allah in both this life and in the Hereafter. Allah says about such a servant in the hadith quoted earlier, "My servant continues to draw near to Me with supererogatory works such that I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his seeing with which he sees, his hand with which he strikes, and his leg with which he walks. Were he to ask of Me, I would surely give him; and were he to ask Me for refuge, I would surely grant him it."[373]

In this hadith, Allah describes those persons who have earned His love. This makes this a most important hadith. This is the goal of the true believers: to purify oneself by worshipping Allah properly and, thereby, gain the love, mercy, pleasure and forgiveness of Allah. In other words, the goal is to become a *wali* (a true devoted servant) of Allah. As discussed in a previous chapter, this is the greatest achievement. Indeed, this is the achievement that no one could ever take from a person. Anyone, by Allah's leave, may destroy whatever another person possesses and prizes of this world but no one can ever touch

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[372] Cf., Ibraaheem Hilaal, introduction to Muhammad ibn Ali al-Shaukaani, *Qatr al-Wali ala Hadeeth al-Wali* (Beirut: Daar Ihyaa al-Turaath al-Arabi, n.d.), p. 149.
[373] Recorded by al-Bukhari.



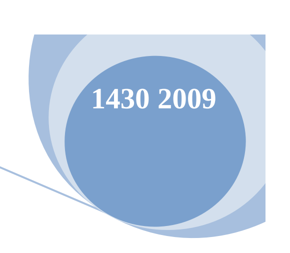
his religion (which is first and foremost in his heart) and his relationship to Allah.

Allah, the Creator and Fashioner of humans, has obligated certain deeds. Those are deeds that are needed by all humans for the purification of their souls. Beyond those deeds, though, Allah has left the door wide open for individuals to concentrate on those deeds that they are most inclined to. For example, some people are dedicated to the voluntary prayers. They receive great increases in their faith and benefit from them. They feel sorrow whenever they miss those prayers. Hence, they tend to them to the best of their ability. Those voluntary prayers— in addition to the general obligatory deeds— may be the way that they get closer to Allah. It may be the key to their entering Paradise. Others may be attracted to fasting, charity or the pilgrimage.

There are yet others who are more inclined to doing good toward others. They perform the obligatory deeds and then beyond that they spend their time tending to others' needs. Those good voluntary deeds bring them closer to Allah and more beloved to Him. Yet others are attracted to voluntary Jihad, teaching the religion, calling non-Muslims to Islam and so forth. When these people tend to those matters, they become the key by which they come closer to Allah and enter Paradise. Someone else might do a little of all of the different types of voluntary deeds and that is what makes him beloved to Allah.[374]

This reality is all by the mercy of Allah. Beyond the obligatory deeds, people are free to pursue those good voluntary deeds that they are most attracted to. There are so many areas of voluntary deeds that it seems inconceivable that a person could not find some voluntary deed or deeds that he would like to perform in order to get closer to Allah. Allah's path to paradise is wide enough to accommodate all of those different leanings. However, this is all dependent on the individual first fulfilling, in general, the obligatory deeds. If the person does not do that, then he may not be on the straight path at all.

[374] Cf., quote in Fareed (pp. 30-31) from Muhammad ibn al-Qayyim, *Tareeq al-Hijratain*, p. 179.



Means to Help One Along the Path

It is admitted that it is much easier to identify that process than it is to make oneself walk along that path. Therefore, mention must be made (however briefly) of specific means and measures that in general should help one follow the path of purification. In essence, these “means and measures” simply fall into one of the steps described in the process of purification (that is, they fall into the category of either obligatory or recommended acts). However, within those steps, there are some acts that seem most prominent in bringing about additional benefit for the purification of the soul. Hence, they are specifically highlighted here. The actions include the following:

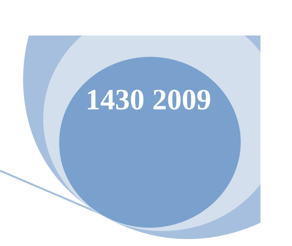
(1) Turning to and praying to Allah for help and guidance: This step usually takes place before the attaining of knowledge. One should seek guidance from Allah concerning all matters but especially to know the path that leads to His pleasure.

(2) Taking the steps to attain sound and beneficial knowledge: Allah willing, knowledge will be given to the person by Allah as a result of his sincere supplication and his taking the steps to attain that knowledge. In particular, though, the relevant knowledge concerning spiritual purification cannot be found in detail unless one studies both the Quran and the hadith of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him).

(3) Proper *dhikr* (remembrance of Allah): After the knowledge comes *dhikr* which, in essence, means keeping that awareness and knowledge alive and at a conscious level. Without this awareness, there is no hope in one actually applying or benefiting from what one has learned.

(4) Contemplation and reflection: Contemplation moves one to a stronger and greater level of faith. It builds upon and strengthens the *dhikr*. It also assists the individual in developing a more mature understanding of the knowledge he has received. It also helps him in tying that knowledge into everything that is happening around him, in turn enhancing his intensity of *dhikr*.

(5) Realizing the true nature of this worldly existence: This can really be considered a result of contemplation or a further development in one’s spiri-



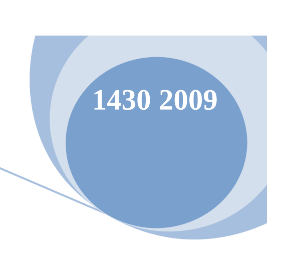
tual progression. It refers to a deeper understanding that the life of the Hereafter is the only real life and that this worldly life is not the life that one has been created to live for or seek after with all of one's means and abilities. The realizing of the true importance or lack thereof of this worldly life assists in repelling the strong temptations found in this world.

(6) Striving against any evil inclinations in the soul: "Striving against the soul" (*jihaad al-nafs*) becomes much easier after the above steps have been taken. The soul may always present some temptations, diseases or weaknesses. One must strive but it is very possible and plausible given the right tools to overcome any weakness that the soul may possess.

(7) Having righteous companions, friends and spouses: This is to give one further strength and support. The goal of being surrounded by pious companions is that they keep that *dhikr* alive. Such companions also advise each other, give strength to each other when they become weak and encourage each other to do the correct deeds. In addition, they can offer each other knowledge and guidance, especially during troubling or confusing times.

(8) Attending the mosques: Attending the mosques strengthens the ties with other righteous Muslims, helps improve one's prayers (which in itself is a key to spiritual purification), allows one to gain access to sources of knowledge, provides a place for being reminded of one's purpose in life and provides a place to witness pious examples which encourage one to strive harder for spiritual purification.

(9) Taking account of one's deeds, behavior and character: This is the refinement process that no program can be successful without. One must constantly go over the different steps that one has taken and the different actions that one has performed to see where there are faults and what must be improved. One must never be negligent of this practice as otherwise one may be falling into a deep abyss and never even realize what is occurring. Without realizing what is occurring, it is difficult to imagine that the person will be able to do anything about it.



Harmful Aspects for the Soul

The major impediments and dangers to one's spiritual purification must be recognized by the Muslim. He must be aware of them so that he may protect himself from them. Some of these may be summarized as follows:

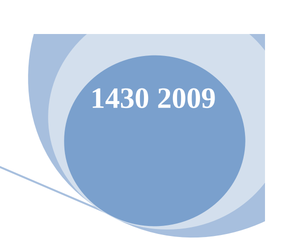
(1) Desires, lusts and passions: These are the urges that occur in the soul and drive a person to commit an act that he knows is displeasing to Allah. Unless one works to control and overcome these desires, they can be disastrous for his effort of purification. Indeed, they can even completely overcome the person and become the "god" which he starts to worship.

(2) Ignorance, doubts and misconceptions: It is via ignorance that one does not know what the correct path is. When a person does not realize his own ignorance, he acts thinking that what he is doing is correct while it may actually be very harmful. In addition, ignorance can also lead to doubts and uncertainty. Doubts and uncertainty in turn affect a person's resolve and willingness to sacrifice to remain upon the path of purification.

(3) Innovations and heresies: These are of extreme danger for the purification of the soul. In essence, they can lead a person down an errant path while he believes that he is following nothing but the truth. It is only by sound knowledge and by following the way of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) closely that one can avoid falling into this major pitfall.

(4) Sins: One gets closer to Allah by acts of obedience and one distances himself from Allah by sins and acts of disobedience. No matter whether the sin is a major or minor one, it signifies, at least to some extent, a step back in one's journey of spiritual purification.

(5) Being overcome by this world and its glitter: One of the greatest dangers, especially in this day and age, is to be overcome with all of the "pleasures and excitement" that this world has to offer. This worldly life can make one lose one's focus. Instead of concentrating on the Hereafter, one begins to work to accumulate the goods of this world. The situation can be so bad that the individual sacrifices the Hereafter for this life. This would sound a crushing defeat for the soul's purification process.



(6) Evil companions, environment and surroundings: One's surroundings and one's friends can greatly influence an individual. For example, at the very least, evil friends may suggest deeds and ideas that are displeasing to Allah and harmful to the soul. Beyond that, they may further encourage and even help the person perform acts that are clearly disliked by Allah. Such friends and environments can clearly be a hindrance in one's path of purification.

(7) Satan and his soldiers: When Allah created man, He had already created an enemy that was going to test his will and his devotion to Allah. When mankind gives into Satan, Satan's only goal is to drag him into the Hell-fire. To protect himself on the path of purification, the believer must always be aware of Satan and his ways of operating.

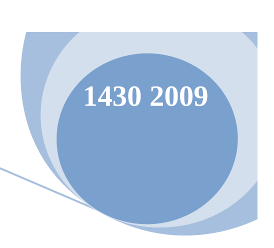
(8) The enemies of Allah (those who have earned His wrath and those who have gone astray): These are the people who have either knowingly or unknowingly gone away from the path of purification. One must always be wary of them as they will either intentionally try to drive a person away from the Straight Path or they may inadvertently misadvise a Muslim causing him to swerve from the Straight Path.

Repentance

Even if one tries his best to follow all of the steps and means that help one purify his soul, the nature of man is such that, in general, he is bound to falter every now and then. In fact, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, "All humans continually commit sins. The best of those who continually commit sins are those who repent often."[375]

When a person falters and sins, though, that is not the end of the matter. As long as he has not reached the moment of death, the door to repentance will remain open to him. He need not despair—as long as he brings himself to account and repents to Allah for the sins and transgressions he has committed. Allah clearly states, "Say: O My servants who have transgressed against their souls, despair not of the mercy of Allah for Allah forgives all sins, He is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful" (39:53).

[375] Recorded by Ahmad, al-Tirmidhi, ibn Maajah and al-Haakim. According to al-Albaani, it is *hasan*.See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami*, vol. 2, p. 831.



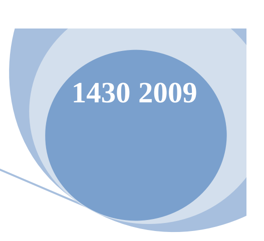
The true repentance includes (1) stopping oneself from the sin that one is committing, (2) feeling remorse and (3) having the sincere intention to never again return to performing that sin.[376] In essence, it is a true return to serving Allah, as is the human's purpose in this life. Without these components, the individual has not truly or completely repented to Allah.

Ibn Taimiyyah perceptively pointed out that it is more important to repent from wrong beliefs than it is to repent from evil desires. He explains his reasoning behind this argument by stating,

If someone does not perform an obligatory deed or does perform an evil deed, while he believes in its obligation [for the former] or its evil [for the latter], then that belief will urge him on to do the obligatory deed and will keep him from the evil deed. There will not be something constantly urging him or keeping him from doing such deeds. In fact, the urging and preventing forces will be fighting each other. This means that sometimes one will overtake the other and vice versa and his soul will be watching over him. Sometimes he will perform the obligatory deed and sometimes he will not perform it. And sometimes he will perform the evil deed and sometimes he will not perform it. This is the case with many evildoing Muslims who sometimes fulfill rights and other times do not and who sometimes do evil deeds and other times do not because the desires are contradicting in his heart [that is, the desire to do good and the desire to do evil are both in his heart and are competing against each other] since he has in his heart the foundation of faith that orders him to do good and keeps him from evil. But at the same time he has desires and lusts that call him to the opposite of that.

But if the person performs deeds that he [wrongfully] believes are obligatory or he leaves deeds believing they are forbidden, then the driving forces to leave or perform the deed will be constant in his heart and that is much more serious than the first case [mentioned in the paragraph above]. This person must make *taubah* to correct his beliefs first and to find the truth. And this can be much more difficult than the first case if there is nothing driving him to

[376] If the sin also involved the rights of other humans, one must, if possible, also rectify the wrong that he has done.

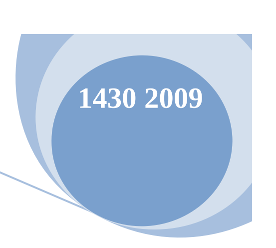


leave his false beliefs- as the person in the first case has something urging him to leave his evil deeds...[377]

In reality, every time someone commits a sin, he is actually distancing himself from Allah—as is clearly implied in the hadith quoted earlier stating that one draws closer to Allah by fulfilling the obligatory deeds and then the voluntary deeds. If that is the case, the believer should immediately seek to remove the negative effect of any sin. This is accomplished by not persisting in sin but by returning to Allah, repenting to Him and seeking His forgiveness. Indeed, it is truly heart moving how in the same set of verses, Allah speaks about the believers committing *faahishah* (shameful acts) and harming their own souls and yet describing them as the inhabitants of paradise. Their key is that they stop their sin and earnestly seek Allah's forgiveness. Allah says, "And those who having done something to be ashamed of or wronged their own souls earnestly bring Allah to mind and ask for forgiveness for their sins—and who can forgive sins except Allah? And are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done. For such the reward is forgiveness from their Lord, and gardens with rivers flowing underneath, an eternal dwelling. How excellent a recompense for those who work (and strive)" (3:135-136).

Indeed, Allah is very pleased with the servant whenever he repents. By repenting, the servant demonstrates his belief that Allah is compassionate, forgiving and merciful. He is also showing his awareness that, deep in his soul, he does not wish to displease Allah or to move away from what pleases Allah. The Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) stated, "Allah is more delighted by the repentance of His believing servant than [the delight of the following person]: A person in a waterless desert having his food and drink upon his camel who sleeps and wakes to find his provisions having been lost. He searches for them until he is about to be overtaken by thirst. He says to himself, 'I shall return to the place where I was and I shall sleep until I die.' He put his head upon his pillow ready to die. Then he awakes to find his camel and his provisions, food and drink with him. Allah is more delighted with the repentance of the believing servant than that [person] is with [finding] his provision."[378] Allah's great pleasure is a very special reward for the repentant.

[377] Ibn Taimiyyah, "Risaalah fi al-Taubah," vol. 1, pp. 237-238.
[378] Recorded by Muslim.



Indeed, when the believer realizes this fact and keeps this in mind, the drive to repent from all of his sins and shortcomings becomes very strong in his heart.

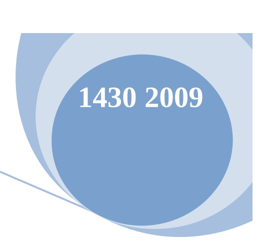
The importance of repentance for the purification of the soul cannot be overstated. It is the final pouring out of the human towards his Lord to remove all remaining blemishes and impurities from the soul, such that the soul is ready to be entered into Allah's paradise. No matter how pious a soul is, there will undoubtedly be shortcomings with respect to the rights of his Lord. These shortcomings, many of which were already touched upon while discussing contemplation since there is a strong relationship between such contemplation and the move to repent, include the following:

(a) A person's acts of worship and obedience to Allah will many times (if not almost always) fall short of his maximum potential. Indeed, being overly pleased and satisfied with one's act of worship is very dangerous for the soul. In fact, those who are truly aware of their relationship with Allah are even more earnest in their seeking of Allah's forgiveness after they complete an act of worship. They understand that they have some shortcoming in their act of worship, such as not being completely attuned to their prayers. The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught all believers to ask for Allah's forgiveness three times as soon as one had finished the obligatory prayers. This practice is reflective of this fact that one can find shortcomings even in his acts of worship.

(b) The believer will never be able to thank Allah completely for all of the bounties that Allah has bestowed on him, no matter how obedient he is to Allah. For example, how can an individual completely thank Allah for Allah's bounty giving him life in the first place? Hence, the individual must repent to Allah for this inability to thank Him completely or sufficiently.

(c) There may even be some portion of "acting for the sake of show" (*riyaa'*) in some of an individual's deeds. If this is the case, then he definitely must repent to Allah for that aspect.

Hence, even the pious must always seek to repent to Allah and ask for His forgiveness. Ibn Taimiyyah wrote,



The servant is always between a blessing from Allah that requires his thanks and a sin that requires the seeking of forgiveness. Both of these circumstances, by necessity, are always with the servant. He is constantly moving among the blessings and bounties of Allah and he is always sinful and in need of repentance and asking for forgiveness. For that reason, the chief of all humans and the leader of the pious, Muhammad (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him), would seek forgiveness in all situations.[379]

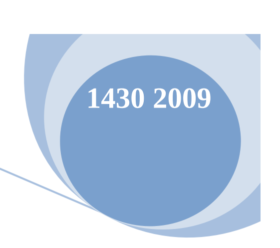
The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) himself used to repent to Allah and seek His forgiveness more than one hundred times a day (as recorded by Muslim).

Besides removing the sins from a person, sincere repentance plays other important roles in purifying the soul. For example, it aids the person in truly humbling himself before his Lord. As the believer recognizes his weaknesses and sins, he realizes that he has no rescue except to turn to Allah humbly, seeking Allah's forgiveness for his errors. This brings him closer to Allah, even though what led him to this particular stage was a sin that he had committed (such is the mercy and grace of Allah). As he considers more of his sins (through taking himself to account for his deeds) and sincerely repents from them, he realizes how far he has strayed and his heart sincerely and humbly tries to submit completely to Allah in the proper way given his abilities.

Repentance is a door that is always open for the person to rectify his ways. No matter how evil a person has become and no matter how many sins he has committed, there is no excuse for him not to mend his ways and to try to purify his soul. A powerful reminder of this fact is Allah's words while mentioning those who burned the believers alive in the incident discussed in *soorah al-Burooj*. Allah says about them, "Those who persecuted the believers, men and women, and do not turn in repentance will have the penalty of Hell: they will have the penalty of the Burning Fire" (85:10). Obviously, then, the door to repentance will be open to any sinner and he need not despair.

Thus, once the person sets himself on the right path, Allah willing, he need not allow what he did in the past to prevent him from getting closer to

[379] Ibn Taimiyyah, *Majmoo*, vol. 10, p. 88.



Allah by performing pious deeds. Some scholars even argue that his state after repenting should be even better than his state beforehand, as he has experienced the sin, realized how wrong it was, turned wholeheartedly to Allah and has vowed to change his ways. As long as one does change and mend his ways, he need not look back at his sins as necessarily evil in the long-run for his spiritual purification. He may have learned a great lesson from that act and it may have helped him reform himself in a way that would not have been possible without his experiencing a need to repent, while that repentance further uplifted his soul via the joy of returning back to one's Lord.

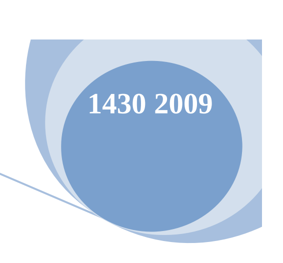
Conclusions

By the grace and mercy of Allah, the path of purification and increasing one's faith is uncomplicated and clear for whoever wills to follow it: It is about correction of one's beliefs and understandings while following that up with the proper implementation in one's actions and deeds.

This is a path consistent with one's natural inclinations but one has to be serious about following it. Even when coming upon the path, one cannot be complacent and assume that nothing will shake him or remove him from that path. No, indeed, he must always be conscious of his faith and what state of health it is in. He should constantly seek those means and measures that he finds support and help his faith. Additionally, he must be aware of and avoid those factors that damage the health of his faith and prevent him from following the Straight Path.

All along, he should be seeking Allah's guidance. Whenever he slips from the path and errs, he should try to immediately return to Allah, seek his forgiveness and ask Allah to set him aright once again on the beautiful path of purification and faith.[380]

[380] It should be noted that this chapter is entirely based on portions of the author's *Purification of the Soul*. For more details concerning the topics discussed herein, the reader is referred to that work.



Final Words for the New Muslim

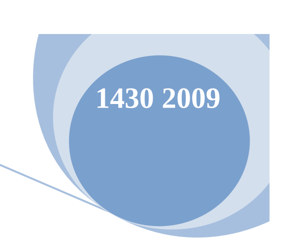
The new Muslim convert has definitely entered into a wonderful new phase in his life. By adhering to Islam, he will be able to receive the blessings of this life and the Hereafter.

In reality, though, for many converts, there are numerous distractions to deal with. In fact, there may be many forces trying to drag the convert back into his previous way of life. A convert's own family and friends may be dissatisfied with the life choice that he has made. The convert feels that he has found the path of truth and right guidance and yet, even though he realizes that, those pulling him in different directions may be very influential upon him. Indeed, he may have many difficult and emotionally wrenching choices ahead of him.

In the face of all of these distractions, the individual must keep in mind his ultimate goal of converting to Islam: the pleasure of his Lord and Creator. He must remind himself that although there may be fleeting pleasures in this world, in reality, there can be nothing more satisfying to the soul than worshipping God. He has to raise himself above lowly desires and accept the true nobility that accompanies being a true servant of God. This ultimate goal can be refreshed through attending to the prayers, reading the Quran and increasing one's knowledge of Islam.

This leads to another important issue. The Muslim convert should not think that he will be able to fight off numerous temptations all on his own. He is still new to the faith and his level of understanding and attachment probably still needs a great deal of support. Hence, he should cling to the Muslim community and the local mosque. These should be his sources of refuge during times of toil and difficulties. It is with the other Muslims that he will be able to strengthen his faith, learn more about Islam and see how Islam is truly to be applied.

The Muslim convert, however, should not expect perfection from the Muslim community or local mosque. There is no official "church" in Islam and many of the mosques, especially in the West, are run by volunteers who have plenty of other preoccupations. It would be wonderful if the mosque would



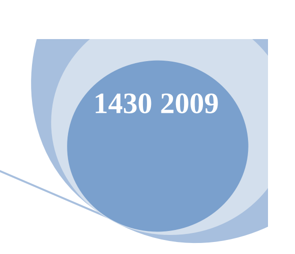
appoint a learned Muslim to look after each individual convert but, unfortunately, such is often not feasible. In general, though, every Muslim community is happy to add a new member to its fold, whether a convert or a Muslim new to the area, and does want to help. Allah willing, with patience, the convert will be able to find good Muslim friends who will help him along the path.

The Muslim convert should not even expect excellent Islamic behavior from all Muslims. There are pious Muslims; they are less than pious Muslims; there are knowledgeable Muslims; they are ignorant Muslims.[381] Thus, every Muslim, the convert included, has to deal with a whole range of Muslims. For example, sometimes a new Muslim is very exuberant about his new Islam and he wants to express his feeling of brotherhood with the other Muslims. He enters the mosque, giving the greetings of peace to the others in the mosque. Some Muslims are simply not used to that behavior and they look at the convert as if he is very strange, without giving any reply to his greetings, even though it is obligatory for at least one of them to reply to his greetings. One can just imagine how deflating that could be where one enters with such enthusiasm and joy and has his exuberance deflated by his new brothers and sisters in Islam. There was no evil intent on the part of the Muslims but the result can still be very disheartening.

In sum, many Muslims that the convert meets may fall very short of a convert's expectations. At the same time, the convert must realize that he has his own shortcomings that harm his interaction with the other Muslims. He himself probably still has a long way to go. He may still have many diseases in his heart left over from his pre-Islamic days. A new Muslim may also unwittingly do things very offensive toward Muslims. For example, the convert may still speak in lewd ways about the opposite sex or joke in manners considered inappropriate by Muslims. Thus, for both the convert and the other Muslims there may be some uncomfortable moments.

Patience and perseverance are definitely required. The convert should remind himself that he is a new Muslim and that there may be many aspects of the faith that he yet understands or applies properly. He must remind himself

[381] In the same way that every individual has shortcomings, he should not be surprised that others also have shortcomings. If someone is very willing to overlook his own shortcomings, he should also be flexible, to some extent, with others' shortcomings.



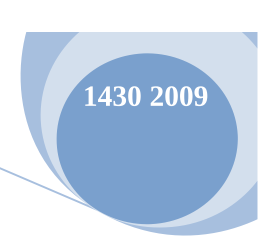
that other Muslims are simply human as well and all humans will have some shortcomings. First and foremost, though, he should remind himself of his ultimate goal: pleasing his Lord. The minor problems and issues that one encounters in this world should never deter the individual when he realizes that enduring such things are definitely well worth it in the end.

Every Muslim should expect to face some trials and difficulties in this world. The goal that one is seeking—the pleasure of Allah and His infinite reward of Paradise in the Hereafter—is very dear and precious.[382] One should not expect it nor demand it of his Creator without some effort, patience and sacrifice on his own part. Thus, Allah says, “Do people think that they will be left alone because they say, ‘We believe,’ and will not be tested. We indeed tested those who were before them. And Allah will certainly make (it) known (the truth of) those who are true, and will certainly make (it) known (the falsehood of) those who are liars, [although Allah knows all that before putting them to test]” (29:2-3). Allah also says, “Do you think that you will enter Paradise without such (trials) as came to those who passed away before you? They were afflicted with severe poverty and ailments and were so shaken that even the Messenger and those who believed along with him said, ‘When (will come) the Help of Allah?’ Yes! Certainly, the Help of Allah is near” (2:214).

Every Muslim, including the convert, should prepare himself mentally and emotionally to be able to undergo any type of trial for the sake of Allah. A Muslim should use all of the means at his disposal to improve and strengthen himself. This would include, as noted above, finding one’s local mosque and clinging to the best people who are living their lives according to the Quran and Sunnah.

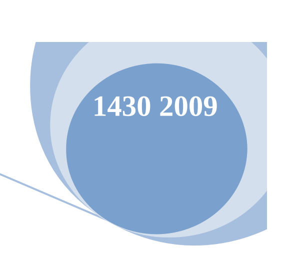
This also includes exerting oneself to increase one’s knowledge of Islam. This can be done by attending lectures in the mosque, reading books and accessing other sources of knowledge. Nowadays, in English, for example, there is a great amount of information available to the convert. Unfortunately, not everything that is said or written about Islam is of the same quality or level of trustworthiness. It is extremely difficult to sift through the large quantity of

[382] The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said, “Verily, Allah’s merchandise is dear and precious. Truly, Allah’s merchandise is Paradise.” Recorded by al-Tirmidhi. According to al-Albaani, it is a good hadith. See al-Albaani, *Saheeh al-Jaami al-Sagheer* # 6222.



material available today. Some booksellers, though, do try to be selective concerning the material that they sell. A couple of the better booksellers would be www.darussalam.com and www.al-basheer.com. Some websites also have very good material about Islam. One may explore, for example, www.whyislam.org, www.islamway.com or www.usc.edu/dept/MSA.

Finally, every Muslim should continually turn to Allah and ask Allah for guidance and to be confirmed upon the Straight Path. A Muslim is required to recite *soorah al-Faatihah* at least seventeen times a day in his prayers. In this *soorah*, one prays to Allah, "Guide us to the Straight Path." This supplication includes both being shown the Straight Path as well as being helped to remain along that Straight Path. Furthermore, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) taught the Muslim Nation a very important supplication. The Companion Anas narrated that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) would make the following supplication often, "O [Allah,] the One who Turns the Hearts, confirm my heart upon Your religion."



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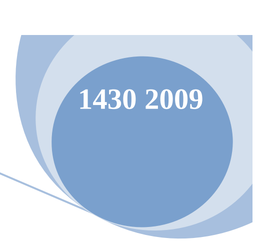
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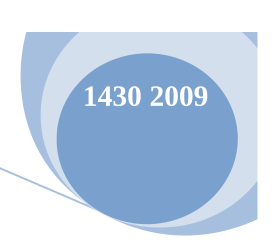
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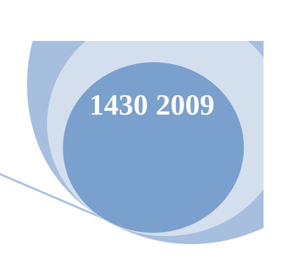
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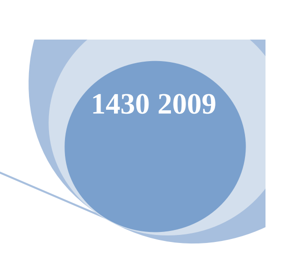
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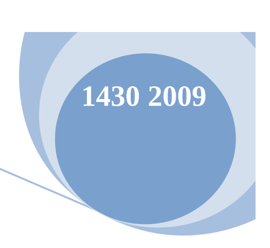
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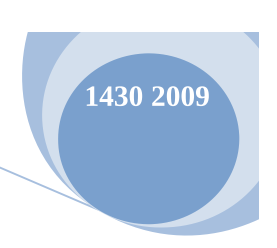
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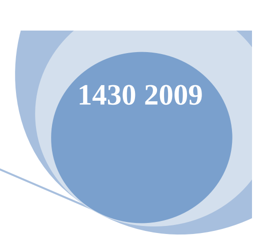
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